MHI-09
Indian National Movement

Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Social Sciences

Block

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The establishment of British colonial rule in India after the battle of Plassey heralded a new era in the history of the subcontinent. The colonial rule was characterised by its ignorance or wilful neglect of the earlier administrative practices which allowed the peasants and non-peasant groups certain concessions in times of adversity. In the initial period, the colonial rulers were interested in extracting money from the people in all forms that they could. This led to drastic decline in the capability of the rural population to withstand adverse circumstances. Thus, a very large number of people died during the catastrophic Bengal famine of 1769. Although the colonial rulers tried to streamline the land-revenue administration in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and also tried to restrict the naked loot, the exploitation of the peasantry remained at a high level.

This caused continued resistance from the people right since the foundation of the colonial rule. Hundreds of peasant rebellions have been registered since then, culminating in the great revolt of 1857. Peasant and tribal rebellions continued even later, but in the later half of the nineteenth century we notice the beginning of a different form of politics. It was the modern politics in which the English-educated Indian intelligentsia played an important role. An all-India sphere of politics was sought to be created on the basis of nationalist ideology which the new intelligentsia eagerly professed. Such political activities led to the establishment of various local and provincial associations ultimately resulting in the formation of an all-India body – Indian National Congress in 1885. This Course discusses in detail this new form of politics and ideology based on nationalism which endeavoured to forge an independent nation by ending the colonial rule.

In this Course, there are 8 Blocks consisting of 35 Units covering various aspects of the Indian nationalist movement since its inception in the late nineteenth century. Indian nationalist movement, like other nationalist movements, had both similarities and differences with the model of nationalism created on the basis of European experiences. In **Block 1**, we have discussed various theories and concepts which underlie nationalisms of multiple types in many parts of the world. This Block clearly outlines that there has not been an overarching model of nationalism which can be applied in all cases. Each case, though having affinity and certain similarities with others, is unique with its own circumstances and development. Even in case of nationalism in one country, there is no unanimity of opinions about its origins and growth. This has been illustrated by detailed historiographical survey of Indian nationalism in Units 3 and 4.

Block 2 discusses the early phase of Indian nationalist movement from the late nineteenth century to the Swadeshi movement in the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides creating various organisations, including the Indian National Congress, the Indian nationalist movement developed a broad-based economic critique of colonialism which debunked the idea that the colonial rule was in the interests of the Indians. The Swadeshi movement was a nationalist upsurge where various threads of earlier nationalist critiques were joined.

In **Blocks 3 and 4**, you will learn about the nationalist movement in its mass-based and popular phases from 1918 to 1939. Here you will find that the Indian nationalist movement was not at all monolithic. Numerous ideological and political trends and organisations constituted it. On the one side of the spectrum is located the Gandhian belief in non-violence while on the other side one finds the revolutionaries who believed that acts of violence were necessary to make

the people aware of their subjection and to galvanise them against the colonial state. Similarly, you find the liberals on the one hand who believed that it was important to accept whatever little constitutional concessions were given by the British, while on the other hand there existed persons like Subhas Chandra Bose and soldiers of Indian National Army who fought armed battles against the British. Right inside the Congress, we find the right wing (which was in favour of the propertied classes and was against giving many concessions to the workers and peasants) and the left wing (which supported radical programmes for the masses). The fact that Gandhiji was able to bring most classes and groups within the same movement, at least at some junctures, says a lot about his acceptance as a great national leader by most Indians.

Block 5 focuses on the politics of the 1940s leading to Indian independence. It begins with the circumstances which gave rise to one of the great nationalist upsurges with massive popular participation – the Quit India Movement in 1942. Although the movement was crushed brutally by the British, it became quite clear during and after this movement that the Indians had shaken off the ideological influence exercised by the colonial rulers. Many popular protest movements in the mid-1940s, particularly those in support of the INA prisoners and RIN rebels, clearly revealed popular sentiments against colonial rule. The weakening of imperialist system during the War and the disenchantment of the people from colonial government left no options for the British but to leave India. This they did in 1947. However, they had sown the seeds of communal discord which resulted in the partition of India. Despite efforts from the nationalist forces of all hues, the communal vivisection of the country could not be stopped. This may be said to be one of the great failures of the nationalist movement.

Blocks 6 and 7 are concerned with the relationship between the nationalist movement (particularly its most important organisation, the Indian National Congress) and various classes and groups. In the era of democratic and mass politics, the success of any movement and organisation is gauged by their capabilities to bring the people of various kinds within its fold. The Units in these Blocks will discuss in detail the manner in which the nationalist leaders and organisations gradually built bridges with peasants, workers, women and dalits, and brought them within the ambit of the nationalist movement. The nationalist movement presented an all-class front where even antagonistic classes could co-exist.

Block 8 presents an overview of the achievements of the Indian nationalist movement. The strategies employed by the movement to carry out its struggle against the colonial rule and their successes and failures are the themes of this Block. The Constitution of India has been one of the most significant achievements of the Indian nationalist movement which emphasised on individual liberty, rule of law and democratic participation. The legacies of the nationalist movement include secularism, pluralism, democracy, social justice and peaceful co-existence.

In some Units, you may sometimes find overlaps or even differing emphases or viewpoints. There may also be some references or terms with which we may not entirely agree. As our Units are written by different persons, we endeavour to maintain authorial freedom. Thus, we have not tried to iron out different ideas or put everything within the same mould. The differences of opinions would also show that certain issues related to the national movement have been interpreted differently by different scholars. Although we have studiously avoided extreme views, we have not removed differences of opinions as they would strengthen healthy debate.

BLOCK 1 INTRODUCTION

The first Unit of this Course will introduce you to the ideas about nations and nationalisms. The nationalism, as we know it, is a modern phenomenon which evolved in eighteenth-century Europe and, in the wake of European hegemony over the globe, spread to all parts of the world. The new form of community, that is nation, was created through imagination and not through shared experiences. Such communities also demanded to have their own representative states, and they succeeded in a large number of cases. It was through this process that the nation-states emerged, which is a completely novel form of state as it is organically connected with the society. **Unit 1** will discuss various theories of nationalism and their relevance in Indian case.

Unit 2 discusses the rise and growth of anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa. It describes and analyses the various forms which the national liberation movements took in the countries of these continents. While some movements, as in India, basically followed a non-violent path of struggle, most other movements were forced to resort to various levels of violence to attain the goal of freedom. Moreover, the nation-states which emerged after the anti-colonial struggles were the result of a variety of factors. No single factor (such as industrial development, common language, public education or even common culture) was responsible for the creation of nation-states in Asia and Africa. In several cases, the feeling of commonness evolved at a general level only after the nation-states had already come into existence and had embarked on the policy of creating nationhood.

The next two Units take up a historiographical survey of the writings on Indian nationalism. In **Unit 3**, we will discus the colonialist, nationalist and Marxist perspectives on Indian nationalism. In the core of colonialist history-writing was the impossibility of India ever becoming a nation, as it was considered as just a conglomeration of numerous castes, religions, and linguistic and regional groups. It also asserted that the Indian national movement was led by a microscopic English-educated minority which did not represent the country. In reaction to this view, many nationalist historians claimed that potentially India had always been a nation, and some even asserted that India was forged into a nation at several points in the past. The nationalist historians also regarded the national movement as a pan-Indian movement encompassing all classes and groups led by idealist and selfless leaders. The Marxist historians criticised both the colonialist and nationalist histories and emphasised on the role of economic factors and classes in the creation of a nation. They argued that the national movement was directly or indirectly in favour of the bourgeoisie, even though most other classes of Indian society were also involved in it.

Unit 4 discusses two more important trends – Cambridge School and Subaltern School. Both question the official glorification of mainstream nationalism and nationalist leaders. But while the Cambridge School historians try to completely debunk the idea of anti-colonial nationalism, the Subaltern historians emphasise the existence of a popular, autonomous and militant nationalism which was different from the official version. Besides these interpretations, we have also briefly discussed another trend which points towards the presence of strong patriotic and even national sentiments in pre-colonial India.

UNIT 1 NATION AND NATIONALISM*

Structure

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Understanding Nation, Nationalism and Nation-State

- 1.2.1 The Question of Nationalism
- 1.2.2 Defining Nation and Nation-State

1.3 Challenges for a Theory of Nationalism

1.4 Theories of Nationalism

- 1.4.1 Non-Modernist Theories
- 1.4.2 Modernist Theories

1.5 Indian Nationalism

1.6 Summary

1.7 Exercises

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the first Unit of the course. It attempts to familiarise you with the concept of nationalism and how it has been understood by historians and other social scientists.

Indian Nationalist Movement, as you are aware, was a grand and prolonged struggle launched against British imperialism. Nationalism was the main ideology and the instrument with whose help this struggle was launched. In the context of the Indian Nationalist Movement, Indian nationalism represented two major ideas: anti-imperialism and national unity. In other words, any person, movement or organisation that practised and upheld these two ideas, could be considered a nationalist.

But nationalism, it is important to remember, was not confined only to India. It was not even confined to the countries of Asia and Africa that came under foreign domination and struggled to get rid of it. Nationalism was truly a global phenomenon that emerged in most countries of the world and made its presence felt. It has been argued that nationalism has been the most powerful political force in the modern world. It has manifested itself as politics, ideology, movement, belief system, a sentiment and also a passion. Large numbers of stories, poems, novels and literature have been written on the theme of nationalism. Nationalism would thus appear to be a complex phenomenon that has emerged in very different and contrasting conditions. Both the developed industrial societies of Europe and the undeveloped societies of Asia and Africa, came under the spell of nationalism. Societies that had very little in common were pervaded by the phenomenon of nationalism roughly at around the same time (18^{th}-20^{th} century). It would thus appear that there must be a general, universal explanation for its emergence, apart from specific explanations applicable only to the context. In other words we are talking about a *theory* of nationalism. This theory (or theories) should account for nationalism *in general*. This Unit will explain to you some of the general theories of nationalism.

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1.2 UNDERSTANDING NATION, NATIONALISM AND NATION-STATE

This Unit will focus on three things: 1) some of the major debates and controversies related to nationalism; 2) the various theories of nationalism that have been offered by the social scientists; and 3) the relevance these theories hold for India as a case-study.

What really is the question of nationalism? And why is it important?

1.2.1 The Question of Nationalism

When we speak of nationalism, we speak of a period between eighteenth and twentieth century. It was during this period that a large number of small, local communities began to be transformed into (a relatively smaller number of) large and homogenous communities. To put it simply, a large number of small communities began to be transformed into a small number of large communities. The largeness of numbers was replaced by the largeness of size. The new communities were marked by new ties and solidarities. New solidarities began to develop that were somewhat impersonal in nature and yet very powerful. Groups and individuals, not familiar with one another, began to look upon themselves as members of this newly created large invisible community called the Nation. What was involved in this process was a new type of imagination. New communities were getting created above all through an "imagination". The new communities were not constituted by reciprocity, common sharing of resources, or familiarity. Most communities in history (village communities, speech communities or other local groups) had been based on familiarity. The new national communities, on the contrary, were based on unfamiliarity and anonymity. The new communities were brought together, not so much by common everyday experiences, but by a certain kind of imagination. It was precisely in this sense that Benedict Anderson, a leading theorist on nationalism, referred to nations as "imagined communities".

What is more, these new groups and communities also began to insist that they should have *their* own representative state. In other words, state systems should not be external and alien to groups and communities (as was the case through most of human history), but should emanate from the communities and should be representative of them. This was really a novel situation. This congruence or identification between the state and society was something quite novel and unusual. These new features of the condition also became the defining features of nation, nationalism and nation-state. Ernest Gellner, another important theorist of nationalism, defined these terms in the opening paragraph of his book: "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist *movement* is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind" (Ernest Gellner 1983: 1).

This definition of nationalism has the merit of clarity and explicitness. The only problem with this is that it is contingent upon an understanding of nation. If nationalism as a political principle represent a congruence of state (political unit)

and nation (national unit), then we should be able to define nation, in order to understand nationalism, as per this definition. A definition of nation is not easy. It is both difficult and contentious. The main trouble with any attempt to define nation is that at any given time, we would find a large number of nations that do not conform to *that* definition. It would thus appear that the actual world of nations is so diverse (in spite of their commonalities) that no single definition can hope to include them all. It is partly for this reason that scholars have generally refrained from providing a universal definition of nation, *applicable to all situations*. They have found it easier to describe specific nations. It has been much more difficult to abstract certain broad principles on the basis of specific experiences. Ernest Gellner identified two attributes that could possibly form part of the generic definition – **culture** and **will**. But he was himself aware of the inadequacy of either, and indeed both of them in correctly identifying all types of nations. To quote him again:

"What then is this contingent, but in our age seemingly universal and normative, idea of the nation? Discussion of two very makeshift, temporary definitions will help to pinpoint this elusive concept. 1) Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communication. 2) Two men are of the same nation if and only if they *recognize* each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it..... Each of these provisional definitions, the cultural and the voluntaristic, has some merit. Each of them singles out an element which is of real importance in the understanding of nationalism. But neither is adequate. Definitions of culture, presupposed by the first definition, in the anthropological rather than the normative sense, are notoriously difficult and unsatisfactory. It is probably best to approach this problem by using this term [nation] without attempting too much in the way of formal definition." (Ibid., p. 7)

1.2.2 Defining Nation and Nation-State

The definitional difficulties mentioned in the previous section notwithstanding, we can still, for the sake of clarity, attempt temporary, makeshift definitions of the two terms – nation and nation-state.

Perhaps the first step towards defining nation is to question and also reject its naturalness. A nation is not a natural human community, given to us. It is historical category, i.e., it is a human community that has been made in history and through history. It is a product of certain historical conditions.

Prior to modern times, i.e., before emergence of nationalism in the late 18th and the 19th centuries, the word 'nation' was used in a whole range of ways. In particular it was employed either in the sense of a race (a biological category) or in the sense of a clan (a social category larger than the family and connected through ties). These usages had nothing in common with the present day usage of the word 'nation' except in so far as they all refer to a human collectivity, which shares certain traits in common.

An entirely new element was imparted to this understanding towards the last decades of the 19th century. Ernest Renan, a French scholar, rejected both the racial/biological as well as the natural definitions of nation. Instead he put forward a voluntaristic definition of nation, based on 'will, memory and consciousness'. This definition had two major characteristics:

1) It did not see nations as an *a priori* reality, existing in a natural kind of way. Instead it saw nations as being formed through the forces of history.

2) It also rejected the notion that nations were formed by natural boundaries such as rivers, mountains and oceans. Instead they were formed by subjective factors such as will and consciousness.

This indeed was a major breakthrough in the understanding of nations. It looked at nations as contingencies brought about by human will. Upon this understanding, there was nothing stable or permanent about nations. They could be formed and also dissolved. In his famous speech on nations, delivered in 1882, Renan said: "Nations are not something eternal. They have begun; they will end. They will be replaced in all probability, by a European confederation. But such is not the law of the century in which we live. At the present time the existence of nations happens to be good, even necessary. Their existence is a guarantee of liberty, which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master."

There was however one major problem with this understanding, quite apart from the fact that it concentrated solely on Europe. It accounted for nations very well and effectively, by creating categories (will, memory and consciousness) that could give as a clue to nations. But these categories were so general in nature they could be found in most communities. Many non-national communities could also be identified on the basis of will and consciousness. Indeed it can be said that most, if not all, human communities can be defined on this basis. How to then distinguish nation as a unique and distinctive human community from an enormously large pool of all kinds of human communities? Renan's definition captured the generic part of nations very well but neglected their distinctive part. In other words, it had the merit of being very inclusive. Its defect was that it was not sufficiently exclusive.

Some of the shortcomings of Renan's understanding were addressed by Joseph Stalin in 1913. He focused on the distinctive features of nations. Stalin defined nations in the following words: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." This definition laid down five main features that would give us a clue to nations: historic continuity, common language, territory, common grid of economic life and a common culture.

Stalin's understanding was in some ways the opposite of Ranan's, even though they both shared the basic digits that nations were *formed* and did not exist as an *a priori* reality. If Renan approached nations from the generic side of the scale, Stalin went to the other end and approached nations from the specific side. Stalin highlighted the distinctive part so much that he perhaps ignored the role of general attributes such as will and consciousness in the making of a nation. If we take the example of European Jews in the 20th century, we would find that the Jewish nation is not adequately covered by Stalin's definition. But it is covered by Renan's.

There is no doubt that Stalin's definition was an advance over Renan's. But even both the definitions put together cannot cover all the possible nations in the world. What is the vital element missing? It is here that Ernest Gellner comes in quite handy. He provided the missing element in 1983 in his book *Nations and Nationalism*. He put forward the important and somewhat controversial idea that nations in the end are made by nationalism, and not the other way round. It is not the case that already formed nations create their own justification through the ideology of nationalism; but rather that nations are made by nationalism. If we apply this understanding to the Indian case, we would infer that it was not the Indian nation that created Indian nationalism, but rather that the Indian nation itself was created (along with various other factors, of course) by the ideology of Indian nationalism.

The addition of this missing element can then complete our definition of nation. If we put all the three elements together – subjective, objective, and ideological, we can say with confidence that we have a definition of nation that covers all the possible nations, which is inclusive enough to cover all nations and also exclusive enough to distinguish nations from other non-national human communities. Here is then our complete definition: By nation we refer to a large, anonymous human community that is brought together by subjective features such as will, consciousness and memory; objective features such as historic continuity, common language, territory, economic life and common culture; and ideological features such as nationalism.

The merit of this definition is that no actual, potential or conceivable nation is outside its net. Yet it excluded the non-nations. It is important however to remember that not all features of this definition apply to all situations. Indian nationalism, for instance, was not based on a common language. Jewish or Polish nationalisms were not based on common territory, or even a common economic life. Many other nationalists of Eastern Europe (Albania for instance) were not based on any great historic continuity. So, not all nations are covered by all the features of the definition. But all in all, we can say that that all the nations – actual or potential – are covered by some features of the definition and that no nation can possibly exist outside this definition net.

Once a comprehensive and inclusive definition of nation is available to us (thanks to the contributions made by Renan in 1882, Stalin in 1913 and Gellner in 1983, stretched over the period of a hundred years), it is easier for us to understand nationalism and nation-state. Nationalism, as mentioned earlier in this unit is the insistence on the congruence of nation and state, in other words that the state should be representative of the people. This is virtually a precondition of nationalism. A nation-state is actually a state of this kind. The human history has been pervaded by all kinds of state systems but none of them fulfilled this nationalist condition. It is only under modern times and conditions that a new type of state – nation-state – emerges in which the society and state are organically connected to each other. To put it differently, nationalism is the main actor that insists on the creation of a nation-state. Nations are large modern communities which desire their own representative state. Nationalism actually helps to bring it about.

Having understood something about nations and nationalism at an elementary level, it is now time to discuss the theories of nationalism, i.e., the major attempts to explain this phenomenon.

1.3 CHALLENGES BEFORE A THEORY OF NATIONALISM

It is significant that the emergence of new national communities happened to coincide with another monumental phenomenon in the world – transformation of the world from agrarian to industrial and the creation of a new type of social order – industrial society. Was it simply a coincidence or were the two transformations (from small local communities to large national communities and from agrarian societies to an industrial social order) connected to each other in a cause-effect relationship? Many scholars thought that the two were integrally connected. Ernest Gellner provided a neat and elegant theory of how the emergence of nationalism was the product of this transformation and was deeply implicated in it. Many others have agreed with him on this point. A large number of scholars have looked at nationalism, as distinctively modern, and some have specifically linked it to industrialism. Upon this view, there was something about industrialism that created nations. The creation of nations was inherent in the process of industrialism. Some of the features of the industrial society were such that the raw material of diverse human communities began to be transformed into the somewhat finished product of neat, standardized, homogenized, large national communities. Evidently the great nationalist experiences of the world required a theory that would be comprehensive enough to cover the range of those experiences. The theory focusing on industrialism did address some questions but left some other questions unanswered.

In particular there was one major trouble with the theory that linked nationalism to industrialism. It is now clear that as industrialism developed, it was confined to small pockets of European countries. Nationalism, by comparison, had spread to large parts of the world. Industrialism and nationalism may have begun at roughly around the same time (late 18th- 19th centuries) but after that their trajectories became very dissimilar. Their trajectories also went contrary to anticipations made about them. On industrialism the general anticipation was that gradually industrial affluence would be diffused and would spread to other parts of the world. Nationalism by comparison was considered a European, rather than a global phenomenon. But both the anticipations turned out not to be the case. Industrialism did not get diffused to the rest of the world in an even and uniform manner. Instead it led to the creation of a European 'core' and a periphery that consisted of the countries of Asia and Africa. The economies of these societies were placed at the service of the core. The core-periphery transactions were carried out through new devices such as imperialism and colonialism.

Nationalism by comparison did spread to the rest of the world and developed as truly a global phenomenon. There was nothing strictly European about it. It also cast its spell on areas and communities that were far from industrialised. This then was a real challenge for a theory of nationalism that sought to explain it in terms of the spread of industrialism and located it within the matrix of industrialism. This called for a new approach and a different explanation.

It should be quite clear that a phenomenon as widespread as nationalism could not have come about simply as an accident. If large parts of the world went through a similar experience, broadly at the same time, then there must be a valid explanation for it. Moreover there also must be broadly similar set of

circumstances giving birth to nationalism. What for instance was common between 19th century England and 20th century India? One was an advance industrial country and an imperialist super power. The other was an economically backward country undergoing imperialist domination. Which common set of circumstances could have brought about nationalism in both these societies?

It was partly for dilemmas such as the ones mentioned above, that we do not have one dominant theory of nationalism, but many. It is not so much that we have different types of nationalisms. But we do have very different explanations for the emergence of nationalism. So divergent are these explanations that Benedict Andersons has written: "...it is hard to think of any political phenomenon which remains so puzzling and about which there is less analytic consensus. No widely accepted definition exists. No one has been able to demonstrate decisively either its modernity or its antiquity....[any collection of writings on nationalism] finds the authors more often with their backs to one another, staring out at different, obscure horizons, than engaged in hand to hand combat." (Benedict Anderson, "Introduction" in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, p. 1). He also stated that the political power of nationalism is matched by its philosophical poverty. This implies that whereas everybody recognizes the political power nationalism enjoys in modern world, there is very little consensus on what has brought it about. Let us therefore turn to different ways in which nationalism has been understood and explained by social scientists.

1.4 THEORIES OF NATIONALISM

Before we illustrate the different theories of nationalism, one or two general points may be made. All the theorists of nationalism would agree that a phenomenon as pervasive and widespread as nationalism cannot be explained only by specific or endogenous factors or factors operative within the society. It can only be satisfactorily explained by external or exogenous factors, or factors from outside the particular society. As Tom Nairn, a leading scholar on nationalism, has put it: "However, it is not true that nationalism of any kind is really the product of these internal motions as such.... Welsh *national*- ism [emphasizing the nation] of course has much to do with the specifics of the Welsh people, their history, their particular forms of oppression and all the rest of it. But Welsh national- *ism* [emphasizing the Ism] – that generic, universal necessity recorded in the very term we are very interested in – has nothing to do with Wales. It is not a Welsh fact, but a fact of general developmental history, that at a specific time the Welsh land and people are forced into the historical process in this fashion." (Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*.)

The main difference among the theorists of nationalism lies in the *identification* of these external factors. Some would look at nationalism as a necessary stage of human development that all societies must go through, sooner or later. Some others might see it in more general terms as the unfolding of the 'human spirit', or a great social and psychological need for identity, or for identifying with a larger whole. But all would agree that the phenomenon of nationalism has a broad, trans-country, generic explanation. If nationalism can be identified on the basis of some common traits, experienced by different societies broadly at the same time (18th – 20th centuries), then there must be some general explanations for it.

However similarities among theorists end here. The theorists may all agree on a need for theory but not on the substance of the theories. They offer very diverse explanations for nationalism. These differences can be best understood through binaries. These binaries range from looking at nationalism as either an accident or a great human need, either necessary or contingent, either ideational (i.e., product of certain ideas) or materialist, either a false consciousness or a great human aspiration, either brought about by certain important social groups or by structures. But the most important binary is that between modernists and non-modernists. Let us look at this binary in some details.

1.4.1 Non-Modernist Theories

As far as theories of nationalism are concerned, perhaps the biggest dividing line is between modernist and non-modernist ones. The modernists look upon nationalism as a modern phenomenon and a product of not more than the last three centuries. On the other side of the divide are the non-modernists who refuse to privilege the modern period for an understanding of nationalism and instead look at the larger spread of time. Their argument is that a phenomenon as deeply pervasive and implicated in human life as nationalism could not have simply been created in such a short span of time and that the phenomenon must have evolved over a long stretch of time.

At this stage it is necessary to highlight that both the positions – modernist as well as non-modernist – are internally quite diverse. Not all modernists agree with each and share little in common except for being modernists. Likewise non-modernists too come in all shapes and sizes. They could easily be divided between evolutionists, naturalists and perennialists. Naturalists often see the nation as something natural and rooted in human mind. They see nationalism as a very natural human sentiment. Upon this understanding, it is somehow natural for people to be nationalists. Since they consider it as natural, they do not have to provide any explanation for it. One major scholar for instance referred to nationalism as a "state of mind". Naturalists do not use expressions like rise or growth or emergence of nationalism. They only talk about a permanent, timeless presence of nationalist feeling in the minds and hearts of people. Nationalism therefore does not need an explanation. Upon this nationalist view, it is not nationalism but its absence that has to be explained.

Close to the naturalists position is the perennialist position. This is often found in the approach of nationalists themselves. The practitioners and ideologues of nationalism often tend to see their brand of nationalism as fully formed in their history. To take an example, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the ideologue and propagator of Pakistani nationalism, often said from 1940 onwards, that a Muslim nation was not a product of recent political developments, but that a Muslim nation existed in a fully finished form in the medieval past. When Jinnah was asked about the exact location of his Muslim nation and when it came into being, he provided an interesting answer: Pakistan already existed since a long time; it was not created in the recent past. He clarified further in a speech: "Pakistan … was not the product of the conduct or misconduct of Hindus. It had always been there; only they [Muslims] were not conscious of it….Pakistan started the moment the first non-Muslim was converted to Islam long before the Muslims established heir rule….Throughout the ages Hindus had remained Hindus and Muslims had remained Muslims and they had not merged their entities – that was the basis for Pakistan" (Jinnah's speech in Aligarh, March 1944, Khurshid Ahmad Khan Yusufi

(ed.), *Speeches, Statements and Messages of the Quaid-e-Azam*, Vol. III, pp. 1840-41). This was a classic example of nationalism as an 'invented tradition'.

At this stage it is necessary to bring out the distinction between a nationalist position and a position on nationalism. All nations have a 'self-image' as articulated by the nationalist ideologues or the leaders. It is important for us to understand this self-image, which tells us a great deal about that particular nation. But it is equally important for us not to endorse it as necessarily valid. In other words, nations and nationalism should be understood as real and powerful sociological phenomena, but their reality is quite different from the tale told about them by nationalists themselves. In the scholarly works on nationalism, the perennialist position has been understood and described as an "invented tradition". What is invented tradition? The idea of "invented tradition" carries the following connotation:

1) Nationalists tend to use and invoke the past and traditions as a legitimizing device to validate their nationalist projects.

2) They also claim legitimacy for *their* nation by claiming its presence in the past, history and traditions, or as a continuation from the past.

3) In such a projection, the tradition is not presented as it was, but rather it is invented or manufactured. The invention of the tradition is done in such a manner to as to support nationalist claims. Jinnah could justify his Muslim nation, only by asserting that there had been no interaction between Hindus and Muslims and hence a Muslim nation existed since a long time in Indian history. In this way, antiquity and tradition were being used to provide legitimacy for a fully modern 'Muslim nation'. The tradition was not being invoked as it was; it was being tailored and projected in a such a manner so as to justify and legitimize the Muslim nation. One way of seeking this legitimacy was to show the presence of this 'Muslim nation' in the distant past and in tradition. For this purpose, the tradition was being 'invented'. The concept of "invented traditions" was coined by leading historian Eric Hobsbawm and it has been a useful concept in understanding the nature of nations and nationalism.

Yet another important non-modernist position is the evolutionist one. It recognizes the pervasive presence of nationalism in the modern period but argues that it can be explained by going to the pre-modern period of human history. This argument focuses on pre-existing cultural traditions, heritages and various other ethnic ties, sentiments and collective memories "which have coalesced over the generations" and thus contributed to the emergence of nations in modern times. To take an example, the nature and pattern of modern Greek nationalism can be understood better by focusing on both the period of Byzantine imperialism and also the classical antiquity. Anthony D.Smith is one of the major proponents of this approach. This approach looks not at the broad and general patterns but features specific to each society. It does not focus so much on what is common to all nations, but rather on what is distinctive about each nation.

1.4.2 Modernist Theories

As against the non-modernist approaches towards understanding nationalism are the modernist ones. As mentioned earlier, not all modernists agree with one another, and that the modernist camp is as diverse as the non-modernist one, if

not more so. One of the earliest modernist arguments was provided by Elie Kedouri in 1961. Kedouri looked at nationalism primarily as a doctrine (as against a force) and saw it as rooted in the intellectual history of modern Europe. The first sentence of his book is self-explanatory: "Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century." (Elie Kedouri, *Nationalism*, p. 1) This was a non-structural explanation of nationalism which saw nationalism as rooted, not in concrete structures and specific conditions, but merely in ideas and doctrines of some European thinkers. An effective alternative to Kedouri was provided by Ernest Gellner who provided the structural explanation.

Gellner saw the emergence of nationalism as the integral part of the transformation of the world from agrarian to industrial. In this sense his theory is both structural and materialist. It is structural in the sense that he does not see it as the result of the activities of a few groups and individual but as the unfolding of new economic and productive forces creating new interplays of power and culture. His theory is materialist in the sense that it looks not as ideas and doctrines as the basic motor in the emergence of nationalist. Rather it sees nationalism as the product of the functioning of new material forces. The theory does recognize the primacy of economic forces in creating new conditions. Following is in brief the essence of Gellner's theory of nationalism:

For reasons not clear to anyone, a new, distinctive and unprecedented type of economy emerged and was established on the Atlantic shores of Europe around the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. This new economy, generically called the industrial economy, had some unique features, compared to earlier economies. One, It was based on perpetual growth. Indeed the economy could survive only if it grew and kept growing. The growing economy completely dismantled the stability of the old order. Two, It required full or substantial literacy for its functioning. This literacy had to be of a homogenous kind so that a large number of anonymous people, unfamiliar with one another, could also communicate with one another. Three, It was characterised by remarkable mobility, both occupation and spatial. Large numbers of people were uprooted from their traditional occupations, locations and cultures. As a result of the functioning of the new economy, they were thrown around from their cosy community settings and were placed in unfamiliar and alien situations. Four, the new economy was also based on egalitarianism. The new economy operated like a hurricane or a huge tidal wave that destroyed the earlier hierarchies based on rank and status. It destroyed old cultures, old structures, old hierarchies and also old community isolation. The mobility and anonymity of the new order created conditions for egalitarianism. Five, the preservation of the old, elite high-culture was found to be completely incompatible with the functioning of the new economy. Under the new situation, the high culture of the elites could not remain confined to the few at the top. It had to become shared and pervasive. So, both the multiple local folk cultures and an exclusive high culture were replaced and transformed into a pervasive and a shared high culture.

The new economy was backed up by modern science and technology and was so powerful that it destroyed the old order and , in time, replaced it with a new social order. The earlier faultlines in the European society (based on rank and status) were eroded and replaced by new boundaries based on culture. New cultures (based on the earlier exclusive high cultures and local folk cultures) developed in these societies and most members, deprived of their earlier cultural

moorings, aspired to be incorporated into the new cultures. At the same time, the role of the state became very important. The new economic apparatus became so large that it could be effectively managed only be the state. The state could maintain it only if it enjoyed the support and the allegiance of the people. This effective state-society partnership could be built only if all were members of the same culture. It was therefore necessary that the state should be representative of the society. All this called for a very new type of arrangement:

- Ordinary people, having been deprived of their cultural moorings, could now aspire to live with dignity only as members of the new high culture. The new high culture could be promoted and protected only by the state. But that could happen only if the people and the state belonged to the same culture. Hence the necessity of a state as representative of the people and from the same cultural stock as the people.

- The new economy was so large that it could not effectively run without the participation of a large number of people. But people had to be trained for the new jobs and roles. Hence 'education' became very necessary. This education had to be uniformly imparted across different categories and could be effectively provided only by the state. Therefore state became very important. In the process of imparting common education, state also released homogenizing forces, which helped in the creation of the new cultural community (or communities), tied through common culture.

- The state could not carry out its task till it had the support and allegiance of the people. It was necessary that people 'belong' to the state and that this belonging should be direct without being mediated by any other ties of kinship and community.

In other words, people should become citizens and should be directly responsible to the state.

In the functioning of all these processes, nationalism becomes the inevitable and inescapable consequence. The modern economy requires it; the modern state requires it; the society also requires it. This is the crux of Gellner's explanation for nationalism.

Gellner provided a credible theory of nationalism. One major problem with it was that it did not seem to correspond to developments in India or indeed in other colonies. The strength of Gellner's theory was that it captured the global nature of the phenomenon very well. Yet it did not seem to adequately cover the nationalist experiences of the colonial societies of Asia and Africa. Indeed it could be said that his theory had been constructed almost entirely on the basis of Western European experiences and then universalised as valid for all of mankind. Is there a theory that can be said to have done justice to the experiences of the colonial societies? It is here that Tom Nairn comes in quite handy. In his book, *Break-Up of Great Britain*, Tom Nairn has explained nationalism as having emanated not from the industrialized European societies but from the colonial societies.

Tom Nairn is both modernist and universalist. He is modernist in the sense that he sees nationalism as a product of the last two centuries. He is universalist because he looks at nationalism as a specific feature of the general historical development of modern world. For him nationalism is an inevitable and integral consequence of a particular stage of human development. In clearer terms, Nairn

sees nationalism as a consequence of the capitalist transformation of the world and of the uneven underdevelopment inherent in capitalism. Here is the essence of his theory:

The world capitalism that emerged in certain pockets of Europe towards the end of the 18th centuries, created a 'myth' of 'even development'. The myth was that gradually capitalism would get diffused throughout the world. But in reality no such even diffusion was possible. Capitalism actually flourished by creating a 'core' (of advance capitalist countries of Europe) and a 'periphery' outside the area of the new industrial-capitalist-world economy , and at the service of the core.

The acute humiliation of unevenness was soon felt in the periphery (the colonial societies of Asia and Africa). The elite in these societies soon discovered that 'progress' in the abstract only meant 'domination' in the concrete for them. Moreover, this domination was exercised by powers that were alien and foreign. In other words capitalism created a system of imperialism and colonialism. It was in this sense that humanity's forward march became synonymous with 'Westernization'. In the colonial societies the elites discovered that they were being excluded from the new system and that their full incorporation in it was just not possible. A large majority of the people in the colonies had to be trampled over rather than initiated into the rules of the new game. They could only be exploited in the new system, not made partners in it at any stage.

So it became clear to the elites in the colonial societies that capitalism had two different faces. Whereas it brought wealth, affluence and mobility to the European world, it brought economic underdevelopment and political subjugation to the people of the colonies. Nationalism was a reaction to *this* situation. The elite in the colonial societies had to take the initiative in organising resistance to this situation of domination, exploitation and exclusion. This meant the conscious organisation, mobilisation and formation of a national community, cutting across class lines and focusing on the separate identity of this community. These elite did not have the economic and political institutions of modernity with whose help they could create this community. Therefore it had to be done on the basis of inherited past, speech, folk-lore, skin colour, etc. "The new middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism had to invite the masses into history; and the invitation card had to be written in a language they understood." Hence the focus on the language of the people. This new venture created a vertical alliance of the elite and the masses against foreign domination and united them in a common struggle to get rid of this domination. Nationalism was inherent in this process of the joint struggle of the elite and the masses against imperialism.

This really is the essence of Tom Nairn's theory. As you can see, this is essentially a modernist understanding of nationalism but very different from other modernist understandings which concentrated their attention on Europe. Tom Nairn, as you can see, is very close to the Indian experience of nationalism. His theory applies to anti-colonial nationalisms in general and Indian nationalism in particular.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that it is necessary for us to talk, not of one grand theory but, of many and different theories of nationalism. Even those who share a basic premise or concern (such as the modernists do), offer very different explanations for the phenomenon of nationalism. Some focus on ideas and doctrines and some on concrete processes. Some focus on the role and activities of groups and classes and some on structures. Some see nationalism as

emanating from within the heart of capitalism and some look at it as the consequence of the uneven spread of capitalism and as a reaction to imperialism and colonialism. This diversity in theories is quite inevitable. Nationalist experiences have been so varied that no single theory can be expected to satisfactorily provide the explanation applicable to all situations.

1.5 INDIAN NATIONALISM

What about Indian nationalism? Does it fit into the established theories or does it need a separate theory of its own? It would be best to look at Indian nationalism as a case-study of nationalism in general, but as an important and distinctive case-study. It may not be necessary to construct a separate theory of Indian nationalism, but rather that general theories of nationalism will have to be modified and tailored so as to accommodate the Indian case-study. Perhaps one should separately look at the two components of the Indian experience – the Indian component (specific) and the nationalist (generic) one. It should therefore be seen both as *Indian* nationalism and also as Indian *nationalism*.

The generic component first. It is necessary to highlight the modernity of the Indian nation. Even though India is an old civilisational society with a long continuous history of many centuries, Indian nation is a modern phenomenon. Large parts of India were ruled by many large empires in the past (Mauryan, Gupta, Mughal) and this dynastic continuity did help in the evolution if an Indian identity during the pre-modern period. Yet it would not be correct to speak of an Indian nation prior to the 19th century. So whereas an Indian society or an Indian civilization certainly existed, a national community of Indian people certainly did not. An Indian nation was made in the 19th and the 20th centuries by the ideology of Indian nationalism under conditions of British imperialism. So we can say that the general explanations of nationalism in terms of a stage of history would be relevant for an understanding of Indian nationalism too.

Indian nationalism was territorial rather than ethnic or religious. This meant that the claim to Indianness was put forward on the basis of territory and nor religion. Anyone who lived on the India soil was considered a member of the national community. It was not so much the common culture or a common language (as elucidated by Stalin's definition) that went into the making of the national community, but rather the common economic exploitation under British imperialism.

Apart from some general features, Indian nationalism also had some distinctive features of its own. In the second half of the 19th century, the Indian intelligentsia was constantly told by some British scholars, bureaucrats and ethnographers that there was not, nor could ever be, an Indian nation. One British scholar John Strachey, wrote in his book, *India: Its Administration and Progress* (1888): "This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India – that there is not and never was an India or even any country of India, possessing according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious: no Indian nation, no 'people of India', of which we hear so much." Likewise John Seeley wrote in his book, *The Expansion of England* (1883): "The notion that India is a nationality rests upon that vulgar error which political science principally aims at eradication. India is not a political name, but only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa. It does not mark the territory of a nation and a language, but the territories of many nations and many languages."

It was broadly in these terms that the inherent impossibility of the Indian nation was highlighted. India was referred to as "a mere geographical expression". The British colonial discourses on India emphasized India's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and looked upon it as a barrier to the development of Indian nationhood. One way of reacting to these statements would have been to go back to the mythical unity of Indian people in the past. But the majority of Indian intellectuals refrained from replying to the 'no nation' charge with an 'always a nation' assertion. They did not go over to the other extreme. Bipan Chandra writes: "The initiators of the Indian National Movement, the 19th century intellectuals, did not deny the British assertion that India was not yet a nation. They readily accepted that India was not yet a formed nation despite common history, geography and the elements of a common culture. They also accepted that nation and nationalism had not existed in India in the past. They acknowledged the incoherence of India as also the existence of multiplicity of identities in it. They also accepted that nation was not a natural or inevitable phenomenon but was a historical creation. But they denied that India could not become a nation. They answered the imperialist taunts by claiming that historical forces were gradually bringing the Indian people together and that India had now entered the process of becoming a nation. India, they said, was a nation-in-the-making, which was the title of Surendranath Banerjee's autobiography." (Bipan Chandra, "The Making of the Indian Nation", in *Indica*, March 2004, p. 21).

And so, one important feature of the thinking of the 19th century Indian thinkers was to make a distinction between nation and civilization and highlight the novelty of the Indian nation. They argued that India was old civilization , but a new nation. Even those leaders who highlighted the superiority of Indian civilization and glorified India's past, recognized the modernity of the Indian nation. Swami Vivekanand said in 1896: "A nation is being made out of India's different races. I sometimes think they are no less various than the different peoples of Europe." The 19th century Indian leaders constantly made references to "new nation", new India, "new national spirit", "development of nationhood" etc. It can therefore be said that 'invention of tradition' as a standard nationalist device was not resorted to by the 19th century Indian nationalists. The focused on the novelty rather than the antiquity of the Indian nation. It was however later in the 20th century that some leaders considered Indian nation to be perennial and always present in Indian history. They also glorified India's past and traditions and projected them on India's present.

Apart from this feature, Indian nationalism was plural, non-coercive and civil. It was plural in the sense that the Indian nationalist leaders recognized the great Indian diversity but refused to consider it as a weakness or an obstacle that would have to go away in the journey towards nationhood. In other words, they consciously promoted the idea of the Indian nation as being based on cultural plurality rather than cultural monism. Perhaps the best statement endorsing India's plurality and linking it with nationalism came from Mahatma Gandhi who wrote in his weekly journal *Harijan* in 1940: "India is a big country, a big nation, composed of different cultures which are tending to blend with one another, each complementing the rest. If I must wait for the completion of this process, I must wait. It may not be completed in my day. I shall love to die in the faith that it must come in the fullness of time." As is clear from Gandhi's statement, the Indian nationalist leaders fully recognized that nation making for India was a long process and far from accomplished. And that India's diversity was no obstacle

in India's nationhood. Nationalism and pluralism could be combined together. When India became independent and acquired a constitution in 1950, the Constitution makers refused to recognized any single language as the national language. Rather, they enlisted 14 important Indian languages and designated all of them as official languages. The number of India's official languages has now increased to 22.

Indian nation has also been remarkably non-coercive. It is true that all nationalisms are essentially homogenizing forces and they try to create a large pool of national culture in which all local and minority cultures are expected to merge. This really is the story of most nations of the world. Indian nation by comparison was remarkable non-coercive. It was based on the idea of 'consensus' but this consensus was not to be enforced from the top. Both during the period of the anti-imperialist struggle, and during the independence period, national unity was promoted through non-coercive ways and methods.

To sum up this section, there are certain features of Indian nationalism that conform to general pattern of nationalism as illustrated in the theories. But it also has its own specific features which may not be covered by the theories. Therefore it is essential that the general theories and principles of nationalism should retain enough flexibility to be able to accommodate different and diverse nationalist experiences in different parts of the world.

1.6 SUMMARY

This Unit has highlighted some of the major explanations for the emergence of the phenomenon of nationalism. The following points have been made in the Unit:

- An elementary understanding of terms such as nation, nationalism and nation-state is absolutely essential for our enquiry. Nation should be understood as a very special and distinctive human community. Nationalism is a political principle that insists that this national community should have its own representative State. Nation-State is the example of such a State in which the State is representative of the nation and emanates from it. To put it differently, different types of human communities have dotted the earth. Nation is one such human community, but a very unique and a special one, which appeared on the scene only towards the 19th century under particular circumstances. Likewise, various kinds of state systems have made their appearance in human history. Nation-State is one such State but a very unique and a special one. Nation-States also appeared on the scene only from 19th century onwards. The linkages between the two – nation and the Nation-State – can only be understood with reference to nationalism. Nationalism brings the two together.

- The theories of nationalism can be broadly divided into modernist and non-modernist ones. The modernist theories consider nationalism to be a modern phenomenon belonging to the history of the world during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Some of the non-modernist theories tend to see nationalism as a 'natural human feeling' not requiring any particular explanation. Some others see nationalism as a prolonged evolution, spread over centuries in which various cultural or linguistic communities evolved into national communities.

- An influential modernist theory of nationalism has been provided by Ernest Gellner. Gellner locates the emergence of nationalism in the transformation of the world from agrarian to industrial. The functioning of the new industrial society was such that it necessitated the creation of large national communities. In other words there was something about the features and functioning of the industrial society that resulted in the emergence of nationalism as a force, all over the world.

- However, there was one major problem with Gellner's theory. The specific features of the industrial society, as outlined by Gellner, were fully operative only in the developed European societies. Nationalism, by contrast, emerged as a truly global force, active as much in the non-developed non-European zones of the world as in the European ones. There question therefore was: how to explain the emergence of nationalism in the countries of Asia and Africa, which had not experienced the affluence and growth brought about by industrialism?

- This question was answered by Tom Nairn, another modernist theorist of nationalism. Tom Nairn also, like Gellner, linked nationalism to the functioning o the global capitalist economy. But, unlike Gellner, he located his explanation, not in the growth, literacy and mobility of the industrial societies, but in the unevenness, dislocation and disparity created by industrialism, particularly across societies. This unevenness divided the world into a 'European core' and an 'Asian and African periphery'. In other words, capitalism created imperialism and colonialism. The elite of the periphery in particular experienced the humiliation of this unevenness. In order to counter it, they worked towards creating larger communities in unity and solidarity, cutting across lines, to fight imperialist domination. It was in this process that nationalism emerged in the colonies.

- Undoubtedly Tom Nairn's theory comes closer to the actual process in which a national community of Indian people evolved in the 19th and the 20th India. The Indian nationalist experience can be best understood f we divide it into a 'generic' and a 'specific' component. The generic component would be broadly similar to the process of nation-formation in other societies. However, the Indian experience had its own distinctive features. This Unit has highlighted both the generic and the specific features.

- To sum up, in order to properly understand and explain Indian nationalism, it is necessary to have a twin focus. One, we need to focus on the generic conditions and the unfolding of the global forces that resulted in the emergence of nationalism. At the same time, we need to focus on the specific Indian conditions that played a role in evolving a national community of the Indian people. The theories of nationalism need to take both the generic and the society-specific factors into consideration.

1.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the modernist theories about the emergence of nations and nationalism.

2) Critically discuss the various definitions of nations and nation-states.

3) What are the non-modernist theories of nationalism? What is their importance?

UNIT 2 ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT: ASIA AND AFRICA*

Structure

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Violence and Non-Violence

2.3 Nationalist Ideologies

2.4 Intellectual and Social Origins and Visualisations of Nationalism

2.5 Nations, Nationalisms and the Partition of States

2.6 Economic Context of National Movements

2.7 Summary

2.8 Exercises

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonialism based on territorial conquest has become a legacy of the past but economic and military disparities between the former colonies and the metropolitan powers are substantial even today. The history of the struggle against colonial rule is important not merely to understand the evolution of countries in Africa and Asia but also the regimes that emerged after independence. A comparative study of anti-colonial movements is easier now on the basis of the published works available. In this Unit, we will discuss the growth of anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa.

2.2 VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE

Although there were a few straightforward armed struggles against colonial rule the primarily non-violent struggle led by the Indian National Congress under Mahatma Gandhi was indeed an exception in the history of anti-colonial struggles. The struggles against the French and subsequently the Americans in Vietnam took the course of a violent liberation movement. The rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States of America as the defender of the free world introduced a measure of conflict in anti-colonial movements after World War II that was absent in the case of those countries that had gained independence during the late 1940s. India and China managed to choose their paths of development after prolonged struggles against foreign domination before the cold war began in earnest. Even smaller countries managed to avoid the consequences of cold war rivalry like Sri Lanka and Burma during the late 1940s. Vietnam and Korea, however, were divided as a result of superpower rivalry after the USA decided to stop peasant armies from bringing communists to power.

The history of liberation struggles has been shaped by two decisive factors. One was the extent of leeway left by the colonial power for the colonized to express their nationalist aspirations through open and legitimate channels. The British

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set up representative or consultative bodies that allowed for more moderate forms of anti-colonial politics to flourish and compete with the more militant expressions of nationalism. The French in many of their colonies did not evolve such mechanism, and the absence of any space for moderate and constitutional politics led to the emergence of the Vietnamese liberation struggle under Ho Chi Minh. In China the defeat of the communist party in the urban centres led Mao to build his base in the rural areas during the 1930s. A powerful and predominantly peasant armed struggle against Japanese aggression (1937-1945), based on a class coalition dominated by the communists, emerged under Mao-tse-Tung. The opportunities for more liberal and moderate politics in China were absent and so the movement took a more radical turn than in India.

The second factor in the anti-colonial struggles was the role of external interventions during the cold war. There were countries that fell clearly under one sphere of influence but there were many that were the arenas of contestation. In Malaya the British stayed on to crush the communist movement and in North Korea and North Vietnam the communists assumed complete control under independent leaders with support from China and the USSR. In many countries there were struggles to dominate the national movement and after the Sino-Soviet split of the mid 1960s there were pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions in the liberation struggles of many African countries like Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. The fate of many small nations was often determined by super power rivalry and negotiation and not the strength of their anti-colonial movements.

The role of external factors in attaining national independence cannot be underestimated. Developments in Paris and Lisbon determined the outcome of struggles in French Algeria and Portuguese Angola and Mozambique. If there had not been changes in the political equations in France in 1958 and Portugal in 1974 the liberation of colonies in Africa would have been a more long drawn affair, although their struggles had been long and bloody enough. The decolonisation of Africa was influenced by developments in the metropolis just as the partition of Africa was after the Berlin Conference in 1885. The movements for independence in Dutch Indonesia, British Malaya and French Indo-China gained momentum because of the victorious sweep of Japanese armies in their regions. The strength of national liberation struggles is not belittled by acknowledging the tremendous economic and political consequences of the Second World War for the colonial powers in East and South Asia.

The colonial powers had divided up many parts of the world without regard to the ethnic, linguistic or religious attributes of their colonised subjects. The boundaries were drawn up in a way that militated against the earlier conceptions of shared or overlapping sovereignty in many regions. In the late 19th century, after the period of conflict between 1885-1893, the French forced the Thai king to part with a large part of the territories that he claimed but the process of defining clear boundaries based on maps and sovereignty also enabled him to assert greater control over the territories that remained a part of his kingdom. The colonial powers deliberately encouraged Arab nationalism to weaken the Ottoman Empire during the first two decades of the twentieth century, but the boundaries of the Arab states that they created by 1921 after its dismemberment have remained more or less unaltered. The unification of Egypt and Syria, partly spurred by pan-Arabism, was short-lived lasting from 1958 to 1961. Nationalism

involved the sharper definition of territory and identity and often led to violence or suppression of minorities. Internal colonialism provoked national movements against states that had emerged successful after anti-colonial struggles. Bangladeshi nationalism triumphed in 1971 but the Kurds have had little success against the Turks or Iraqis.

2.3 NATIONALIST IDEOLOGIES

In a celebrated work, *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson, it has been argued that the idea of the nation and nation-state in its modular form developed in France after the Revolution of 1789. It then spread across the globe with the aid of print capitalism and elites promoting national languages and sometimes creating national languages along the way. Partha Chatterjee has critiqued this derivative discourse of nationalism. According to him, nationalist ideas in India developed in the private and more spiritual domain shielded from the dominant western discourse in the public sphere. The 'construction' of the imagined community has also been questioned. Elements of ethnicity or race cannot be the products of shared imagination alone. The latter view has been advocated by S.A. Smith. Nationalisms can emerge based on one or more elements – language, ethnicity, citizenship and even religion. Scholars differentiate between primordialist and civic nationalisms, cultural and constitutional nationalisms and exclusive and assimilationist nationalisms based on historical evidence.

The ideology of Indian nationalism for the most part was concerned with an economic critique of British rule in India as in Naoroji's *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*. During the late 19th century the element of cultural nationalism too emerged and influenced a small but significant number of people during the anti-colonial struggle. The element of racial antagonism was much less evident in India than in other countries and certainly less so than in Africa. The absence of significant number of white settlers in India, unlike Algeria, Kenya and South Africa, partly accounts for this. Another factor was the historical experience of slavery in Africa: the large scale export of slaves to the New World by Europeans, sometimes in collaboration with local African elites and Arab traders. The white settlers were responsible for creating a strong element of racial antagonism against the white man because they appropriated the best lands for cultivation and the most hospitable areas for habitation. The European powers were responsible for creating racial barriers throughout the colonial world but in Africa these often took more extreme forms. This was particularly true of countries like Algeria, Rhodesia and South Africa. Therefore the economic critique of colonialism was often overshadowed by the critique of white rule and racism as in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth.*

In all the countries that came under colonial rule there emerged a clear distinction between the rulers and the colonized. The entire literature that flourished after the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 has been concerned with the unequal power relations between the colonizing power and the colonized people and the construction of both the Orient and the Occident, perceptions of the Other also fashioning conceptions about the Self. European perceptions of Indian society and culture whether by the more flattering Orientalist admirers of ancient Indian literature and religion like William Jones or the more dismissive Utilitarians like Mill or condescending Anglicists like Macaulay were part of the same discourse that in a way Orientalized India. The great veneration for the wisdom of the

Vedic texts and Aryan culture shaped Indian responses to European cultural domination. It gave a great impetus to reform of Hinduism as well as a measure of cultural confidence to the Hindu middle classes in their struggle against European cultural domination.

In the case of Indian Muslims the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the eclipse of Muslim powers after the 18th century quickened a spirit of revivalism and of Pan-Islamism. Shah Wali-Ullah, Syed Ahmed Barelvi, Jalaluddin Afghani, the Ali brothers and even Mohammad Iqbal contributed to these trends. Syed Ahmad Khan and Mohammad Ali Jinnah were concerned with the political and economic rights of the Muslims in the subcontinent and were willing to mobilize their community in whatever way they could, even accepting help offered by the British rulers. Religion in the subcontinent has been a very important factor in shaping political identities and nationalism. Identities based on language and region and caste developed too but the identities based on religion became predominant during the closing years of colonial rule and led eventually to the partition of India in 1947. The role of religion has been underestimated in Anderson's emphasis on the construction of national identities based on language. Print capitalism, communitarian competition and colonial policies of divide-and-rule worked to give religious identities the overdetermining role in late colonial India.

In many countries with an overwhelming Muslim population or with a significant Muslim minority religion has played a prominent role in developing responses to European cultural and political domination. In Indonesia the growth of nationalism was linked to a kind of Muslim identity although the Sarekat Islam did not have the influence that similar parties have wielded in South Asia and West Asia. The difference can be attributed to the presence of other religious groups in Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia as well as a milder form of Islam practiced by these Muslim communities far removed from the heartland of Islam in the Arab world. The memories of the Arab conquest of Spain – which inspired the Andalusian novel in Arab literature – have not been a factor in this part of the world. The principles of Panchshila as enunciated in August 1945 dropped all reference to religion to achieve "solid unity" in Indonesia. Sukarno, and subsequently Suharto, endorsed a broadly secular form of nationalism. Also the rise of communist movements in Indonesia and Malaysia before they achieved independence indicates the presence of alternative ideologies. Retreating colonial powers ensured the success of anti-communist nationalists in these countries. Some Arab leaders like Bourguiba of Tunisia thought nationalism was the best antidote against communism because it promoted the interests of the people as a whole. In the West Asian region the colonial powers exercised dominion but did not often set down deep roots. Iraq was under formal colonial rule for a brief period after World War I until 1932 although it was under neo-colonial influence until 1958. Iran too had to endure informal imperialism but not direct colonial rule. Arab nationalism emerged with the development of pan-Arabism, but there was no demand for a single united Arab state. The earliest pan-Arabists conceived of at least three Arab states east of Suez-Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. The existence of twenty odd Arab states following colonial wars and the post World War I settlement added the more pervasive influence of local loyalties based on nation-state sponsored nationalism. Arab nationalism was based on tradition as well as new uses of tradition. The achievements of thirteen centuries of Islamic civilisation came to be regarded as those of Arab civilization. Even if Islam and Arabism were not identical they were not perceived as antagonistic to

each other. While in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula Islam played an important role in the development of nationalism this was not true of the central lands of Islam like Egypt and the Crescent which had substantial Arab Christian populations. Advanced conceptions of Arab nationalism developed in Iraq during the 1930s and 1940s, in Syria during the 1950s, and in Egypt during the 1960s. Secularism and socialism too played a role in shaping the ideology of Arab nationalism. Also there has been a prolonged conflict between the Islamic revivalists and the nationalists in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

The Turkish people were ruled by a modernizer like Mustafa Kemal who abolished the position of the Khalifa, the religious head of the Muslim community, even while Indian Muslims protested against the treatment of Turkey and the Khalifa. A scholar has found some similarities in the developments in Kemalist Turkey and those in Soviet Central Asia during the 1920s and 1930s – in terms of modernisation and secularisation from above by an elite, spread of literacy, improvement in the position of women and adoption of the Roman script to develop the national language. The subordination of religion to the state in Turkey was carried out by the introduction of a uniform civil code based on that of Switzerland in 1926. As part of the nationalisation of Islam the Quran was translated into Turkish in 1933 for the first time. During the 1990s there was an attempt to reconfigure nationalism in terms of an Ottoman-Islamic tradition by commemorating the victory of the Ottomans against the Christian West at Constantinople in 1453. In any case religious nationalism in a regressive form became more significant in the Islamic world only after the upsurge against the Shah of Iran in 1979. In the earlier period nationalist elites had supported progressive leaders like Bourgiba of Tunisia, Baath Socialist parties in Syria and Iraq and patriotic leaders like Mossadegh in Iran and Nasser in Egypt.

2.4 INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL ORIGINS AND VISUALISATIONS OF NATIONALISM

The origins of nationalism in many countries were closely related to the contacts that small minorities in Africa and Asia developed with Europeans whether missionaries, travellers, scholars or traders. Nationalists, when they articulated nationalism, would go back to the ancient period of their history but the development of nationalism was intimately connected with the interaction with Europeans. It is not necessary to argue that the initial interactions produced any spirit of nationalism; what this period did was to create a group of people who could absorb ideas about nations and nationalism. The British conquest of Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century created the basis for a new class of people tied to British interests and by the early nineteenth century a stratum inspired by western ideas of liberalism and culture. The Young Bengal movement and intellectuals like Ram Mohan Roy and Bankim Chandra grappled with western domination and articulated indigenous responses to it. It was only in 1885 that the Indian National Congress was formed by westernized Indians.

China was never fully colonized and even the Japanese were unable to go beyond the territories of eastern China, substantial though these regions were. The Chinese had some of the attributes of nationalism even before the modern era because they had developed wood-block printing, had a large bureaucracy recruited through public examinations and a centralized state. The Chinese historian Liang

Qichao early in the twentieth century anticipated Anderson's concept of the imagined community itself. Modern China's conception of nationalism was based on Han primacy although the Chinese communists believed in safeguarding the interests of the national minorities in China. Unlike the Soviet Union, China never offered the right of secession to the national minorities. This was partly because Chinese communists did not need the support of the minorities to fight for freedom or socialism. After the Japanese invasion the Kuomintang and the Communist party were able to accept similar views about the Chinese nation or *zhonghua minzu*: the centrality of the Han people and the inclusion of non-Han borderlands within China. While the Kuomintang called the national minorities clans, the communists were prepared to call them nationalities. All that these nationalities could claim, however, was equality within the nation not the right to secession.

There are problems in identifying the nature of nationalities and nationalism in East Asia which are the product of long term historical factors and also recent state practices. The Vietnamese language has a high proportion of Chinese words because of prolonged contact rather than any genetic connection with the Chinese language. In standard Thai considerable vocabulary is derived from Khmer, which in turn draws on Sanskrit, and these three languages are genetically unrelated to each other. The Kachin in Burma developed an ethnic identity largely as a result of politics, not any essential characteristics based on language or ethnicity. Biology and spoken language were less important in shaping differences in the pre-colonial period compared to differences based on locality, kinship and Buddhist or Chinese traditions. Only after the border regions of empires were brought within well defined borders of countries by the early twentieth century that the modern states in East Asia became involved in ethnic classifications. The Han Chinese had regarded other nationalities as barbarians and the Qing and Republican Chinese recognized five major 'races' in China. The ethnic classification or *minzu shibie* in 1962 put all the *minzu* on an equal footing within the Chinese nation. Although about four hundred groups were identified on the basis of difference only fifty six *minzu* were recognized. The Chinese also built up the claims of groups designated the Zhuang in Guangzi and Yunnan by encouraging this identity and allowing them to link up with the Tai-speaking groups of Vietnam and Cambodia. The state plays an important role in promoting claims of minorities or in modifying their rights and claims.

In West Africa the colonial intelligentsia began to emerge during the 1840s. Saro pioneers (people of Yoruba descent, liberated slaves educated in Sierra Leone) who settled in Nigeria in 1839 were not the ones who brought European education to the region. The notables of the coast had hired teachers to get the necessary education to profit from the trade of the Atlantic economy from the sixteenth century onwards. Freetown and Lagos drew people from diverse backgrounds. Freedmen from Brazil and the Caribbean, American blacks from Liberia, Jamaican maroons, and indigenous Mende and Temne contributed to the educated community. The Fourah Bay College set up in 1827 in Sierra Leone to train Africans to work for the Church Missionary Society played an important role in West Africa. Links to "the culture of the Black Atlantic" dominated intellectual life until late in the 19th century. Although their numbers were not large the West African intelligentsia had emerged earlier than in other regions.

Many members of the West African intelligentsia were deeply influenced by Christianity and sought to find their place as Africans within the framework of the European civilizing mission. The development of African cultural identity and nationalism was influenced by the spread of Christianity in many regions. This set it apart from the Arab and Muslim world as also South and South East Asia. The African nationalism or cultural self assertion took the form of creating African controlled churches with diverse ideologies. In 1937 Lord Hailey in a survey of nationalism saw these black churches as the indicators of a kind of national awakening. It has been argued that although Christian missionaries provided a common language for educated members of different tribes in West Africa they wanted to mould the Africans to suit the interests of the colonizers. The Christian Churches were European dominated and did not deal with the Africans as equals although the access to western education and the Bible added to their self-worth and sharpened a sense of justice. This initially led to the proliferation of splinter African churches and then the denial of equality led them to turn towards nationalism. A more generalized argument has been that while the Christian missionaries opened up the prospects of a wider world they did not actually bring the Africans closer to achieving what they offered in terms of western capitalist culture. This gap between what they seemed to offer and what actually came to pass produced a range of responses from resistance to more overt forms of rebellion. African nationalism was quickened partly by this process.

The inspiration for nationalism has come from turning to the past achievements of the nation or the inner or spiritual life of the people based on religion or culture. In Africa people outside Egypt were proud of the achievements of Pharonic Egypt and the Nile civilisation, but also of traditional tribal culture. Early nationalists discovered and highlighted the strengths of traditional religion or culture. In Thailand, which was not colonized, there was a preoccupation with the idea of civilization and the appropriation from the west of those ideas that were relevant for a civilized life. The west was setting new standards of civilisation as once India and China had. The Sanskrit word for civilisation invented during the 19th century – *Arayatham [araya+ dhamma]* – did not take off. *Siwilai*, an adaptation of the word from English or *charoen*, a fourteenth century Khmer word, became far more popular.

In the ethnic interpretation of nationalism the Vietnamese nation had emerged almost a thousand years ago in opposition to Chinese rule, but those who believed in communal solidarity of the village community highlighted its role in linking up with both nationalism and communism in various ways in the 20th century. The idea of Annam or Indochina rather than Vietnamese nationalism inspired Nguyen An Ninh and others during the 1920s but it eventually lost out. Contemporary scholars explore Vietnamese history from the standpoint of the Cham, Khmer, Moung, Chinese and not merely the Kinh. The internal divisions among the Vietnamese and not merely their united struggle against foreign powers are now subjects of study.

2.5 NATIONS, NATIONALISMS AND THE PARTITION OF STATES

The incorporation of vast territories in Asia and Africa by the colonial powers was a long drawn process without any method in the mad scramble for colonies.

There were economic reasons for acquiring colonies and also strategic considerations which led to annexations. The partition of the non-European world was also carried out to acquire territories that were likely to be of value in the future or simply to prevent a rival from extending his sway in a region. The countries created because of these factors often lacked anything in common except the ruling power. The anti-colonial movements in countries carved out of vast unexplored territories, particularly in Africa, lacked any clear basis for the articulation of a national movement. The boundaries had been drawn arbitrarily by diplomatic negotiations in European capitals and systems of rule introduced with little regard for the tribal, linguistic or ethnic identities of the inhabitants. The national movements were based on the bonds of colour or black racial identity. National movements based on identity of race were, however, undermined by identities based on tribe, religion and language.

In West Africa the struggle of the Nigerian nationalists against British rule was partly undermined because of the division between the predominantly Christian south of the country and the Muslim dominated northern region. Ethnic divisions provoked the Igbo to secede soon after independence. After a bloody civil war between 1967 and 1970 Biafra was reincorporated in Nigeria. In East Africa the Mau Mau uprising brought out the ethnic tensions in the country and helped the Kikuyu move from a subordinate position to one of dominance. Those who fought the colonial rulers were often subjected to severe repression and ethnic differences were exploited to perpetuate colonial rule. The Africans have found it easier to create Pan-African ideologies based on shared blackness or Negritude as articulated by Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta than to unite individual countries ignoring tribal identities. The colonial powers too encouraged secessionist demands for economic reasons. Belgian Congo was divided so that the resources of Katanga could be more easily controlled. The division of territories in West Asia was fraught with great difficulties because the discovery of oil in the region had made it a vital matter for major corporations and the colonial powers. Kuwait was carved out as an independent country allegedly to weaken the bargaining power of the oil producing states. The politics of decolonization bears the stamp of an implicit or explicit struggle to control the resources of the colonies as well as estimations of the gains from formal empire.

A recent study has asserted that the British adopted a strategy in Africa that was designed to prevent an anti-colonial coalition of the kind that developed in India. The British adopted a policy of divide and rule and tried to play off one ethnic group against the other, a policy that was also pursued in India. The British recruited disproportionately from the Tiv in Nigeria, Acholi in Uganda and the Kamba in Kenya for the military. In Africa British policy was to rule indirectly through traditional structures of authority which were only subordinated to colonial interests, not undermined or destroyed. On the other hand the French, who believed in greater centralisation of power and incorporation of colonial subjects within Greater France, destroyed traditional social structures. They also promoted an elite based on acceptance of French language and culture disregarding earlier status rankings. Thus the British produced an unranked system of ethnic stratification unlike the French. This allowed ethnic competition under the British which intensified after the colonies became independent. The traditional structures allowed disaffected ethnic groups to organize effectively against oppressive elites in the post-colonial period in the former British colonies.

On the basis of data relevant to 48 countries the study has concluded that the former British colonies were marked by more conflict even though grievances were higher in the former French colonies.

It is arguable that the exploitation of ethnic differences in British colonies has been underestimated by this study. The British divided Ireland, India, and Palestine before they handed over power to nationalist leaders. Although the British often divided their colonies before they quit them they were more willing to withdraw peacefully from their colonies than the French. The former colonies, both British and French, tried to create federations with or without support from the retreating colonial power. After the Central African Federation created in 1963 failed Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya went their separate ways. Federations often failed because of the anxieties of the more developed national group that it would have to bear the burden of the less developed regions. Gabon had these fears about the Central African Republic that four French colonies tried to set up. Cote d' Ivoire in West Africa and Kenya in East Africa were wary of federation for the same reasons.

In South Asia after World War II the strength of the national movement and the breakdown of colonial authority and inter-community relations made a policy of retreat appear eminently sensible. The Labour leadership of Britain was willing to see the writing on the wall but only in South Asia. In the African colonies the British thought it worth their while to focus on Empire Development schemes to link the colonies to the metropolis and to use their resources to shore up the Sterling Area created during the economic crisis of the inter-war period. The tin, rubber, cocoa, tea and other products of empire were still useful in post-war British recovery and the elites were not willing to recognize the 'winds of change' until the 1960s. The defeat in the Suez crisis of 1956, marked by the fall of the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and the vindication of the nationalist policy of Abdul Nasser of Egypt, helped the British come to grips with their vanishing imperial role. Formal rule and informal systems of domination were no longer options for the former colonial powers in the world order emerging during the cold war period. The two superpowers dominated although the non-aligned countries under Nasser, Nehru and Tito tried to retain their autonomy.

Notions of nationalism were promoted by the colonial powers and post colonial elites according to various economic and strategic considerations that sometimes brought them together. The idea of Greater Malaysia was promoted by the British after the Malay leader Tanku Abdul Rehman supported the notion in 1961. Although the Tanku did not particularly want Singapore as part of greater Malaysia he had to go along with the plan to secure the resources of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo. Thus Malaya that had achieved independence in 1957 accepted Singapore and the Borneo territories as part of Malaysia in 1963. Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore went along with the British strategic plan to protect their interests during the cold war because he too wanted to thwart the rise of communism. Thus the fear of communism helped to sustain a federation that had little to do with grassroots support, although Singapore itself pulled out in 1965. Nationalism did not always play a role in the creation of nation-states or political formations.

The impact of the cold war on decolonization is complex. In some ways it led to the mistaken perception in the west that the autonomous national movements in Asia and Africa were the subordinate allies, or worse still, the stooges of Soviet

and Chinese sponsors. In some countries the colonial powers retreated because they did not want the more radical elements in society to come anywhere near power. Metropolitan economic interests could be more effectively defended by handing over power to pliant nationalist elites dependent on external support than to more independent or pro-socialist leaders. The emergence of several military dictatorships in Africa reflected the sharp polarization in societies during the cold war- reducing the middle ground for moderate reformers and democratic socialists.

2.6 ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF NATIONAL MOVEMENTS

It has been an acknowledged fact that the possession of colonies was a matter of great economic importance. The motives for colonial expansion were the search for raw materials, markets for industrial products and opportunities for profitable investments. In so far as natural resources are concerned both in Asia and Africa there is overwhelming evidence to support the case of exploitation. The political tribute to Britain and the famous 'drain of wealth' from India was not a phenomenon confined to India. It has been argued that the Netherlands East Indies developed the 'Cultivation System' to export the agricultural commodities from the resource rich Indonesian archipelago to the markets in the west. Arguably, the transfer of resources to the metropolitan power from Indonesia was greater than from India for over half a century. The Dutch took away 17% of the Indonesian national product, which amounted to 8% of Dutch domestic product, during 1921-38. The exploitation of the natural resources of the Asian economies was not confined to the European powers alone. The Japanese exploited the resources of Korea, Manchuria and later China.

The export of industrial goods was dependent on the economic development of the colonial world and the possibilities for export of goods. The intense exploitation of peasant producers reduced their purchasing power and made it difficult to expand the market for manufactured goods from the metropolitan countries. The effort to retain a dominant market share in the colonial countries led many colonizers to try and prevent the development of indigenous industries as well. This was done primarily by following a policy of free trade during the 19th century when Britain was the leading exporter of textiles, railway equipment, steel and machinery. The new industries like chemicals, electricity and motor transport were less dependent on colonial markets in Asia and Africa but they became steadily more important. In countries like India, South Africa and even smaller countries the indigenous manufacturing class became resentful of colonial monopolies and domination and promoted economic nationalism and the struggle for national independence.

In many countries of Africa the development of the indigenous capitalist class was not very significant until after World War II and they did not have a 'national bourgeoisie' trying to use nationalist political pressures to secure more suitable tariff, currency and monetary policies. Where colonialism had a less disruptive role both economic and political progress could be achieved. The pre-colonial culture of the Tswana tribes which led to the institutionalization of property rights in cattle but also progressively in land, a favourable orientation towards the market economy and greater inter-ethnic cooperation enabled Botswana to

achieve remarkable growth rates after independence. Traditional Tswana culture with its "integrative political institutions" survived but similar institutions among the Barotse in Zambia and Bophuthatswana in South Africa collapsed because of a more disruptive colonial impact.

Although some indigenous industries benefitted by the decline in imports from metropolitan countries during the depression years of the 1930s import substitution industrialisation worked only for a handful of countries like India, South Africa and Australia. The key fact to note is that the experience of the drain of wealth and the collaboration of many sections of the indigenous elites with the process of colonial exploitation pushed many anti-colonial movements in an anti-capitalist, anti-landlord or anti-elite direction. High land revenue assessments, railway building beyond indigenous requirements and resources, the political alliance of colonial rulers with exploitative indigenous elites and the forced or market driven commercialisation of agriculture led to economic exploitation, low per capita incomes and disastrous famines. The common people suffered immense hardships during the depression years of the 1930s. The loss of economic opportunities and well-being propelled many poor peasants and ordinary people to join forces with nationalists trying to fight colonial systems of economic exploitation. In many parts of Africa there was growing dependence for food on the adaptation of maize to local conditions, particularly during the last hundred years. The dangers of this over dependence on maize would only manifest itself many years after these countries had gained independence.

It was proposed by Ali Mazrui in the early 1980s that in Africa the evolution of social classes had not advanced sufficiently in the period leading up to independence. Kin and clan based ethnic and tribal identities played a greater role in shaping popular movements than inadequately articulated class identities. The struggle against colonial exploitation and the exploitation of the resources by European business interests and white settlers led to economic resentments and racial animosities. The mobilisation of the masses in some of the African countries might have been lower than in India during the national movement but exploitation was equally strongly felt by those who participated in the struggles for independence. The relative weakness of the anti-colonial struggles in many African countries might have enabled the retreating colonial powers to retain greater economic control over the economies of the post colonial countries than in the case of India. Yet it must not be assumed that all the struggles were nationalist in nature, or that an anti-colonial attitude inevitably led to participation in nationalist struggles. In many countries ordinary people had to endure hardships without being able to join movements whether based on class, ethnicity or religion. This was true of large countries like China and Indonesia as well as smaller ones.

Nationalism arose with the development of social classes associated with the rise of capitalism as propounded by Stalin and Soviet nationality theory of his time. Gellner argued that it was linked to the rise of industrialization and the need to bind society replacing loyalties to clans and kinship by loyalty to the state. In most Afro-Asian nations industrialisation was not sufficiently advanced to play a vital role in promoting nationalism. Agrarian capitalism and the elites who profited by the commercialisation of agriculture often played a role in promoting nationalism. In Egypt and Iraq the powerful landlords- not more than two to three thousand families- played a role in promoting nationalism and in

preventing the emergence of powerful peasant movements through hacienda type estates and repression backed by the state. In Turkey and Iran too those who controlled and owned land and engaged in production for the world market became supporters of national movements to acquire greater control over domestic resources. Of course the educated middle classes played a key role in most national movements. In fact in order to promote industrialisation the educated middle class often turned towards socialism and communism.

In India the peasant movements often slipped out of the control of those organizations that sought to keep them within the confines of a broad based national movement. Many spontaneous movements of the peasants and tribals remained outside the mainstream national movement. Nevertheless the Indian national movement was sufficiently broad based. Although the upper sections of the peasantry identified more closely with the Gandhian programme and method of struggle the national movement was much more a multi-class movement providing the basis for a successful democracy based on adult franchise in the post independence period. In China the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance succeeded on the basis of a peasant based movement that included patriotic landlords based on the experience of the Chinese Communist party in Yenan. The Chinese movement was based on Mao's idea of a popular front against imperialism based on the ideas of New Democracy. Nationalism and socialism became closely inter-twined. Although the Chinese Red Army under Zhang Guotao created six soviet regimes among the Tibetans during 1935-36 based on class struggle this was not mainstream official policy.

In the countries where the spirit of economic nationalism was stronger and the mass base of nationalism greater, economic development after independence was probably higher. This was complicated by the logic of the cold war in the case of East Asia where United States' investments in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan led to high growth rates. Foreign investments accelerated growth in the context of agrarian reforms, public investment in education and export oriented development. By contrast in Africa the cold war did not have such positive consequences in the context of military dictatorships, illiteracy and ethnic conflicts. Even so, the eventual transfer of power in Zimbabwe to the radical Robert Mugabe in 1980, a leader the British conservative government under Margaret Thatcher did not favour, produced a relatively stable government for two decades.

In South Africa which had actually become independent under its white elite early and had imposed apartheid in 1948, the armed struggle spearheaded by the African National Congress led to black majority rule eventually under Nelson Mandela. The struggle against the racist regime cannot be viewed simply in terms of nationalism since the anti-racist struggle did not always take a nationalist form; there were traces of socialism, tribalism and religious sentiment. Further there were different conceptions of nationalism – of the four separate nations consisting of the Blacks, the Coloureds, Asians and the whites recognized by the Congress Alliance because the masses were not ready for a purely anti-racial struggle against apartheid. The economic sanctions against South Africa weakened the resolve of the Afrikaners to retain the system of apartheid as did the struggle of the nationalist groups in South Africa itself. There is enough ground to believe that the relatively peaceful transfer of power to the prisoner of Robben Island may have been made in order to protect the economic position of the powerful

mining interests and foreign companies with a stake in the country and that the ANC went along with it in order to ensure the continued prosperity of South Africa under its new black leadership. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission assuaged racial antagonisms and facilitated this relatively peaceful transition to black majority rule.

2.7 SUMMARY

The historical record does not support any simple theory explaining either the rise of nationalities or national movements or the policy towards them of colonial and post-colonial elites and states. Nationalism is not necessarily connected to capitalist development or industrialisation although they do create the basis for national mobilisation. Language and print capitalism do play a prominent role in the rise of nationalism, but in many cases nationalist elites have promoted the spread of national languages and public education to spread the spirit of nationalism after creating a nation-state. Languages are not always the basis of nationalism since religion has also promoted nationalism. Religious nationalism has been important in many Middle-Eastern countries although other strands of nationalism and other ideologies also co-exist even in this region. Nationalism and the accompanying emphasis on borders, sovereignty and singular identities creates national minorities and sub-national or alternative nationalist ideologies.

Nationalism is a modern ideology which is 'constructed' but cannot be entirely an act of imagination. Ethnicities and languages are themselves products of historical evolution. The alliances forged during the period of nationalist mobilisation and the subsequent policies of the post-colonial states shape the evolution of nationalities. The rise of nationalism cannot be understood in terms of the opposition between western and indigenous sources of nationalism. The elements that go into making nationalities are subject to long term evolution and the impact of mass mobilisation and state practices. Outside the historical context it is not possible to understand the rise and growth of nationalism in Asia and Africa or anywhere in the world.

2.8 EXERCISES

1) Why did some national liberation movements stick to the path of non-violent struggles while others resorted to violence to counter the colonial rule?

2) Discus the intellectual and social origins of nations in Asia and Africa.

3) Discuss the economic contexts of some nationalist movements.

UNIT 3 PERSPECTIVES ON INDIAN NATIONALISM – I*

Structure

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Colonialist Perspective

3.3 Nationalist Views

3.4 Marxist Approaches

3.5 Summary

3.6 Exercises

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Units, you have read about the views on rise and growth of nationalism in Europe, Africa and various parts of Asia. In this Unit and the next one, we will discuss various approaches to the study of nationalism in India. These viewpoints range over a period of more than a century and have multiple points of agreements and disagreements with each other. In this Unit, we will discuss the colonialist, nationalist and Marxist perspectives on Indian nationalism.

3.2 COLONIALIST PERSPECTIVE

The colonialist paradigm on Indian history was given a mature form during the nineteenth century. Beginning with James Mill's *History of India*, the colonialist view could be found in the works of many English historians. Mountstuart Elphinstone, Henry Elliot and John Dowson, W.W. Hunter, and Vincent Smith were some important historians who provided overarching interpretations of Indian history. The colonialist view rejected the idea of India as a nation. The diversity and disunity of India were always emphasized by the colonialist thinkers as justification for the colonial rule which was considered to have united it. Right since early days of colonial rule, India was depicted as a land of hostile and warring units. W.W. Hunter, Herbert Risley and many others emphatically attempted to prove it by segregating and classifying the country in innumerable tribes and castes. When the Indian national movement began emerging in the late nineteenth century and matured during the twentieth century, the famous British historians such a John Strachey and John Seeley asserted that it was impossible to forge a nation in India because it has never had the characteristics of a nation nor it could ever have it in future. According to them, India was a conglomeration of different and often antagonistic religious, ethnic, linguistic and regional groups which could never be welded into a nation.

With the rise of the nationalist movement and the nationalist assertion of the existence of an Indian nation, it became even more necessary for the colonialist ideologues and historians to counter it. This they did by downgrading it as an agitation by some selfish members of the middle classes or the Bengali *Babus*. The strongest statement in this regard was provided by Valentine Chirol who, in

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his *Indian Unrest* (1910), asserted that India was a 'mere geographical expression', and even this geography was forged by the British. In his view, India was a 'variegated jumble of races and peoples, castes and creeds' which could never evolve into a nation, and which, in fact, is 'an antithesis to all that the word "national" implies'. In effect, India was 'inhabited by a great variety of nation', 'there are far more absolutely distinct languages spoken in India than in Europe', and 'there are far more profound racial differences between the Maharatta and the Bengalee than between the German and the Portuguese'. It was only the British rule which 'prevents these ancient divisions from breaking out once more into open and sanguinary strife'. Thus, for him, the term 'India' was no more than a geographic creation by the British for administrative purposes.

Similarly, according to Vincent Smith, there was a basic lack of unity among the Indians. Except during brief periods of imperial rules, Indian body politic always consisted of 'mutually repellent molecules'. The lack of cohesion among the Hindu states made them 'an easy prey to fierce hordes of Arabs, Turks, and Afghans, bound together by stern fanaticism'. This situation of disunity could only be corrected when a central authority was imposed from outside, as by the British. And India would again become fragmented 'if the hand of the benevolent despotism which now holds her in its iron grasp should be withdrawn'. [For details on the colonialist historical approaches, see S.B. Upadhyay 2015].

According to these views, there was no possibility of a movement which could be called national. Even when the national movement became a pan-Indian reality as a mass movement after the First World War, the colonialist historians questioned its effectiveness and attempted to highlight the religious, caste and linguistic divisions to deny it a national character.

3.2 NATIONALIST VIEWS

Nationalist views on Indian nationalism and national movement were formed in response to the colonialist view. While the nationalist writers accepted some of the ideas present in colonialist historiography, they strongly reacted against colonialist denigration of India and its people. In contrast to the instrumentalist approach of many colonialist historians, the nationalist historians adopted an idea-centric approach. There are primarily two views among them: according to some, the nationalist ideas have been adopted under the influence of the West, while some others argue that they have been present since the ancient times. In the early phase of the national movement, the Moderate nationalists generally thought that this spirit of freedom arose primarily due to Western influences. According to these writers, Western education and ideas of liberty were basically responsible for the formation of national consciousness. Later, when the national movement intensified, writers began searching for indigenous roots of such ideas. Both these approaches to nationalism remained in the works of many nationalist historians. Sometimes the same historian would present different views in their different works. Thus, these approaches should be marked basically as ideas rather than as segregated according to historians.

In the first view, the ferment generated in India in the wake of the propagation of Western ideas prepared the English-educated middle classes to form nationalist consciousness. Their yearning for liberty and freedom strengthened their patriotic feelings. The Indian National Congress was the result of the search to find avenue

for self-expression and self-assertion. According to Bisheshwar Prasad, 'The loss of freedom and the spectre of domination by the alien…rankled in the hearts of the people', and this intense feeling was expressed in numerous revolts since the establishment of the British rule culminating in the great revolt of 1857. After that, it sought new channels to express itself. Moreover, the relatively wider spread of the later (Extremist) phase of the national movement was explained, by writer such as R.G. Pradhan, B. Prasad, R.C. Majumdar and Lajpat Rai, as a result of 'better ideas and a greater spirit of freedom, or better leaders who possessed greater zeal, sturdier patriotism and a greater will and capacity to undergo suffering and make sacrifices'. Thus, as Bipan Chandra argues, the 'liberal nationalist writers tend on the whole to base themselves on the Whig view of history and see the national movement as a result of the spread and realization of the idea or spirit of nationalism' [Bipan Chandra 1986: 199, 197]

Many Indian nationalists and nationalist historians did not consider India as a formed nation in modern times. They, in line with Surendranath Banerjea, regarded India as 'a nation-in-the-making'. According to them, the task of the national movement was to unite Indians from various regions and different walks of life into a single nation based on their common grievances. R.C. Majumdar argued that 'the conception of India as a common motherland was still in the realm of fancy. There was no India as it is understood today. There were Bengalis, Hindustanis, Marathas, Sikhs, etc. but no Indian, at the beginning of the nineteenth century'. He thought that it was the movements launched by the Congress which 'gave reality to the ideal of Indian unity'. Tara Chand also thought that creation of an Indian nation was a recent phenomenon which emerged due to 'the combined economic and political change' [cited in Bipan Chandra, 1986: 213].

However, there was another quite powerful trend which asserted that India had been a nation since the earliest times. Radha Kumud Mookerji, in his *Fundamental Unity of India* (1914) and many other works, most famously put forward the idea that India had been great and unified since ancient times. According to him, there had existed a sense of geographical unity of India since early times, and even the idea of nationalism was already present in early India. Har Bilas Sarda, in his *Hindu Superiority* (1906), declared that 'the ancient Hindus were the greatest nation that has yet flourished in the earth' [Bruce T. McCully 1935: 297]. Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) asserted in his *Young India* (1916) that 'fundamentally India has been a nation for the last 2,000 years' [cited in Bipan Chandra 1986: 214]. K.P. Jayaswal, in his *Hindu Polity* (1924), stated that India possessed everything which modern Britain could claim: big empires, enduring and successful republics, representative elective institutions, strong parliaments, a constitutional monarchy, and supremacy of Law above the executive authority.

On a different note, Rabindranath Tagore portrayed India as a civilization where various invaders, such as Greeks, Shakas, Huns, Turks, Persians, Afghans etc, came and became assimilated in its ethos enriching its culture. India was, therefore, not simply a territorial unit but possessed a much broader civilizational and cultural unity. It was in this inclusive and assimilative spirit, and not in the disruptive political strife, that Tagore located India's national identity and differentiated it from European nationalism. Along similar lines, Gandhi also visualized the India of the past and imagined an India of the future. Subhas Chandra Bose, in his *Indian Struggle*, argued that India possessed 'a fundamental unity' despite endless diversity. Jawaharlal Nehru also spoke about 'unity in

diversity' and 'a cultural unity amidst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads'.

Besides the spirit of freedom, the nationalist historians emphasise on a variety of factors for the rise of national movement – the generally unfriendly attitude of the colonial rulers, reactionary policies of Viceroy Lytton, Ilbert Bill controversy, the modern education, printing press, modern literature, and finally the partition of Bengal. The feeling of racial superiority displayed by English people in India and the official policy of racial discrimination in certain matters humiliated the Indians and created bitterness in their minds.

The nationalist historians also underlined the economic factors which led to a feeling of disaffection among Indian people. Exploitation of peasantry, high land revenue, forced cultivation of indigo and some other cash crops, drain of wealth, wasteful expenditure of Indian revenue for maintaining a large military force to be used against the Indians or for fighting wars which did not really concern India, and so on.

The nationalist historians also pointed to the underlying contradiction between the imperialist rule and the Indian people as a whole. By doing this, they papered over all the class, caste, linguistic, regional and religious contradictions which existed in Indian society in order to portray a pan-Indian anti-imperialist front. According to nationalist historians, the national movement was a movement of all classes in Indian society. Since Indian people as a whole had contradiction with imperialism, the national movement represented the feelings of the Indian people against imperialism. As Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a prominent Congress leader, claimed: 'The Congress then is a National organization that knows no difference between British India and Indian India, between one Province and another, between classes and masses, between towns and villages, between the rich and the poor, between agricultural and industrial interests, between castes and communities, or religions' [cited in Bipan Chandra, 1986: 218-19].

The nationalist historians generally believed that the masses were not capable of independent action and were to be mobilised by the middle class leaders. Thus, Surendranath Banerjea wrote in 1911 that 'Wherever you have a middle class, you have enlightenment, freedom, progress and prosperity…. The rise of the middle class in Bengal is therefore the most remarkable and the most reassuring of the signs of the times' [cited in Rajat Ray 1983: 1]. Lajpat Rai commented that 'The masses are easily led astray by governments or by classes in league with governments. In every country it is the educated middle class that leads the movement for political independence or for political progress'. C.F. Andrews and Girija Mukerji also wrote in 1938 in their *The Rise and Growth of the Congress in India* that 'The strength of the All-India movement lay in the newly educated middle classes…. The national movement, thus begun by the Congress, represented both the social aspirations of the middle classes in India and also the supreme desire for freedom and racial justice' [cited in Bipan Chandra, 1986: 219-21].

The nationalist historians think that the nationalist leaders were dedicated idealists inspired by patriotism and the welfare of the country. Even while coming from the middle classes, the nationalist leaders, in this view, possessed no personal or group or class interests and were devoted to the cause of the nation and Indian

people. They acted as selfless spokespersons of the silent majority who could not speak on their own. They represented all classes, communities and groups and pursued national, secular and progressive politics.

3.4 MARXIST APPROACHES

The Marxist historians have been critical of both the colonialist and nationalist views on Indian nationalism. They criticise the colonialist perspective for holding a discriminatory view on India and its people, while they criticise the nationalist commentators for seeking the roots of nationalism in ancient past. They criticise both for not paying attention to economic factors and class differentiation in their analysis of the phenomenon of nationalism.

The Marxist paradigm is based on the analysis of the modes of production and classes. The Marxist historians perceive that there was a basic contradiction between imperialism and the Indian society. But they also do not ignore the class-contradiction within the Indian society. They try to explain these processes with reference to the economic changes under colonialism. And finally, they believe that India was not always a nation but rather a nation which was being created in modern times in which the nationalist movement had an important role to play.

It is by the application of these analytical categories of class and mode of production that M.N. Roy, a great figure in the national and international communist movement during the 1920s, placed the Indian nationalist movement within a universalistic framework. In his book, *India in Transition* (1922), he argued that this movement had developed at a certain juncture in the development of international capitalism. He was of the opinion that India was moving towards capitalism and had already come within the ambit of global capitalism. Thus, the dominant classes in India were not feudal lords but the bourgeoisie. In the context of feudal dominance, the emerging national bourgeoisie is often revolutionary. However, in India, since feudalism was approaching its end, the bourgeoisie had turned conservative in nature and wanted to preserve the existing order. In this situation, only the workers would be revolutionary.

On the issue of Indian nationalism, Roy believed that it was the political ideology of native capitalism which developed in late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the shadow of imperialism. It matured along with the growth of native capital after the First World War. This period also witnessed the rise of the Indian National Congress. Thus, for Roy, Indian national movement represented the 'political ideology and aspiration of a youthful bourgeoisie' [cited in Rajat Ray 1983: 5].

About 25 years later, R.P. Dutt formulated the most influential Marxist interpretation of Indian nationalism in his famous book *India Today* (1947). Dutt held that the revolt of 1857 'was in its essential character and dominant leadership the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned potentates'. Thus it is only from the last quarter of the 19th century that Dutt traced the beginning of the Indian national movement. The Indian National Congress, established in 1885, was the main organisation of this movement. Dutt believed that although the previous activities of the Indian middle classes formed the background, the Congress came into existence 'through the initiative and under the guidance of direct British governmental policy, on a plan secretly

pre-arranged with the Viceroy as an intended weapon for safeguarding British rule against the rising forces of popular unrest and anti-British feeling.' However, Dutt argues that, owing to pressure of popular nationalist feelings, the Congress slowly abandoned its loyalist character and adopted a national role. This resulted in its transformation as a strong anti-colonial force which began to lead people's movement against colonial rule.

Applying the Marxist class analysis to the study of Indian nationalism, he argues that the class base of the Congress and the national movement changed over the period. Thus, in the initial years, Indian nationalism represented 'only big bourgeoisie – the progressive elements among the landowners, the new industrial bourgeoisie and the well-to-do intellectual elements'. Later, in the years preceding the First World War, the urban petty bourgeois class became more influential. After the War, the Indian masses – peasantry and the industrial working classes – made their presence felt.

However, Dutt argues, the leadership remained in the hands of the propertied classes who remained most influential in the Congress. These elements prevented any radicalisation of the movement which could become dangerous to their own interests. He is particularly harsh on Gandhi whom he castigates as the 'the mascot of the bourgeoisie'. He asserts that the Non-cooperation Movement was withdrawn because the masses were becoming too militant and a threat to the propertied classes within and outside the Congress. The Civil Disobedience Movement met with a similar fate when it was 'suddenly and mysteriously called off at the moment when it was reaching its height' in 1932. According to Dutt, the Congress had a 'twofold character' which persisted throughout its history. It was because of the very nature of the Indian bourgeoisie. On the one hand, its contradictions with imperialism prompted it to lead the people's movement against colonial government. But, on the other hand, its fear of a militant movement, which could jeopardise its interests and privileges, drew it back into co-operation with imperialism. It, therefore, played a vacillating role throughout the period of the national movement. Dutt's work proved to be a trendsetter in Marxist historiography on Indian national movement. The latter works of the Marxist historians were in some measures influenced by it.

Dutt's book was followed by A.R. Desai's *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (1948). It is another thoroughgoing account of the colonial period and the rise of nationalism from a Marxist perspective. According to Desai, the Indian national movement developed through five phases. Each phase was based on particular social classes which supported and sustained it. In the first phase, the Indian national movement was basically initiated and supported by the intelligentsia who were the product of the modern English system of education. This phase, which began with Rammohan Roy and his followers, continued till 1885 when the Indian National Congress was founded. Now a new phase began which extended until 1905 when the Swadeshi Movement emerged. In this phase, the national movement represented the interests of the new bourgeoisie which had started developing in India, although it was still in its infancy. The modern education had created a middle class, the development of the Indian and international trade had given rise to a merchant class, and the modern industries had created a class of industrialists. Thus, in its new phase, Indian national movement took up 'the demands of the educated classes and the trading bourgeoisie such as the Indianisation of Services, the association of the Indians

with the administrative machinery of the state, the stoppage of economic drain, and others formulated in the resolutions of the Indian National Congress'.

The third phase of the national movement started with the Swadeshi Movement and continued till 1918. During this phase, the national movement covered a relatively broader social base which included 'sections of the lower-middle class'. In the fourth phase, which covered the period from the Rowlatt Satyagraha to the end of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934, the social base of the national movement expanded enormously. The movement, which was until now confined mainly to the upper and the middle classes, now began to encompass certain sections of the masses. However, according to Desai, the leadership of the Congress remained in the hands of those who were under the strong influence of the Indian capitalist class. From 1918 onwards, the industrial bourgeoisie 'began to exert a powerful influence in determining the programme, policies, strategies, tactics and forms of struggle of the Indian national movement led by the Congress of which Gandhi was the leader.' Two other significant developments during this period were the rise of the left groups since the late 1920s, which tried to introduce pro-people agenda in the national movement, and the consolidation of communal forces which sought to divide the society.

In the fifth phase (1934-39), there was a growing disenchantment with the Gandhian ideology within the Congress and the rise of the Congress Socialists who represented the petty bourgeois elements. Outside the Congress, movements of the peasants, workers, depressed classes and various linguistic nationalities had developed. The divisive ideology of communalism had also grown in influence. However, according to Desai, all these stirrings were not of much consequence and the mainstream was still solidly occupied by the Gandhian Congress which represented the interests of the dominant classes.

These two books initiated the Marxist thinking on Indian national movement. They presented it as a movement dominated by the bourgeoisie. Their main argument is that although various classes, including the peasantry and the working classes, participated in it, its basic character remained bourgeois. This view of national movement remained quite common among the Marxist historians for quite some time. N.M. Goldberg, an important Soviet historian, distinguished between the 'Moderate' and the 'Extremist' wings of early national movement by arguing that the social base of the former was the weak capitalist class tied to foreign capital, while the social base of the latter was constituted by the petty bourgeoisie. Another Soviet historian, V.I. Pavlov, similarly sought to establish a direct co-relation between various bourgeois strata and the different stages of Indian national movement. According to him, in the initial phase, the comprador big bourgeoisie could not take a strong stand against the colonial government which was reflected in 'moderate' activities. In the later stage, the industrial bourgeoisie with interests in local markets was more supportive of a struggle. Even more importantly, the Maratha petty bourgeoisie stirred up struggle against colonial government. Tilak heralded a militant phase in the movement [Rajat Ray, 1983: 11-12].

However, over the years, several Marxist historians began to differ from such restrictive paradigm for analysing and understanding the Indian nationalism. Bipan Chandra began to criticise this view and his criticism became more comprehensive over the years. In his very first book, *The Rise and Growth of Economic*

Nationalism in India (1966), he emphasised on the important role of ideas and argued that ideas are not created directly from particular modes of production, even though the latter shape them. Thus, certain autonomy must be given to the ideas as significant vehicle of action and change. It is true, he says, that 'social relations exist independently of the ideas men form of them', but 'men's understanding of these relations is crucial to their social and political action'. Moreover, he argues that the intellectuals in any society stand above the narrow interests of the class in which they are born. It is 'sheer crude mechanical materialism' to define the intellectuals only on the basis of their origins in particular classes or groups. It is because the intellectuals are guided 'at the level of consciousness, by thought and not by interests'. Therefore, the Indian nationalist leaders, as intellectuals, were acting above the interests of the narrow class or group they were born in. This does not mean, however, that they did not represent any class. But this was done at an ideological level and not for personal gain. As Bipan Chandra puts it:

'Like the best and genuine intellectuals the world over and in all history, the Indian thinkers and intellectuals of the 19th century too were philosophers and not hacks of a party or a class. It is true that they were not above class or group and did in practice represent concrete class or group interests. But when they reflected the interests of a class or a group, they did so through the prism of ideology and not directly as members, or the obedient servants, of that class or group.'

On the basis of his analysis of the economic thinking of the early nationalist leaders, both the so-called moderates and the extremists, Bipan Chandra concludes that their overall economic outlook was 'basically capitalist'. By this he means that 'In nearly every aspect of economic life they championed capitalist growth in general and the interests of the industrial capitalists in particular'. This does not mean that they were working for the individual interests of the capitalists. In fact, the capitalist support for the Congress in the early phase was negligible. Nationalist support for industrial capitalism derived from the belief of the nationalists that 'industrial development along capitalist lines was the only way to regenerate the country in the economic field, or that, in other words, the interests of the industrial capitalist class objectively coincided with the chief national interest of the moment'. Thus, by abandoning the instrumentalist approach espoused by Dutt and Desai, Bipan Chandra began a major change in perspective in the Marxist historiography of the Indian national movement.

However, despite this change in perspective, Bipan Chandra remained anchored to several points of the paradigm developed by R.P. Dutt. In an essay, 'Elements of Continuity and Change in the Early Nationalist Activity', there were many points where his arguments resembled those of Dutt and Desai. Firstly, he interprets the 'peaceful and bloodless' approach of struggle adopted by the nationalist leadership as 'a basic guarantee to the propertied classes that they would at no time be faced with a situation in which their interests might be put in jeopardy even temporarily'. This understanding of non-violence was the same as that of Dutt and Desai. Secondly, he argues that the relationship between the Indian masses and the nationalists always remained problematic. For the moderate leaders, the masses had no role to play. Even the extremists, despite their rhetoric, failed to mobilise the masses. Although the masses came into nationalist fold during the Gandhian period, they were not politicised and the lower classes of

agricultural workers and poor peasants in most parts of country were never politically mobilised, 'so that the social base of the national movement was still not very strong in 1947'. And even when they were mobilised, the masses remained outside the decision-making process and the gulf between them and the leaders was 'unbridged'. According to him, 'the political activity of the masses was rigidly controlled from the top. The masses never became an independent political force. The question of their participation in the decision-making process was never even raised.' Thirdly, the nationalist leaders in all phases of the movement stressed that the process of achievement of national freedom would be evolutionary, and not revolutionary. The basic strategy to attain this goal would be pressure-compromise-pressure. In this strategy, pressure would be brought upon the colonial rulers through agitations, political work and mobilisation of the people. When the authorities were willing to offer concessions, the pressure would be withdrawn and a compromise would be reached. The political concessions given by the colonial rulers would be accepted and worked. After this, the Congress should prepare for another agitation to gain new concessions. It is in this phased, non-violent manner that several political concessions would be taken from the British and this process would ultimately lead to the liberation of the country.

On the basis of his analysis of the social base, the ideology, and the strategy of political struggle, Bipan Chandra concluded that the nationalist movement as represented by the Congress was 'a bourgeois democratic movement, that is, it represented the interests of all classes and segments of Indian society vis-à-vis imperialism but under the hegemony of the industrial bourgeoisie'. This character remained constant throughout its entire history from inception to 1947. Even during the Gandhian phase, there was no change. In fact, according to Bipan Chandra, 'the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the national movement was, if anything, even more firmly clamped down in the Gandhian era than before'.

However, in a later book, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947* (1988), Bipan Chandra has decisively moved away from the views of Dutt and Desai on Indian national movement. Most of the propositions regarding the Indian National Congress developed in the earlier quoted article are now abandoned. The Congress strategy is no longer seen in terms of pressure-compromise-pressure. It is now viewed in terms of Gramscian 'war of position' whereby a prolonged struggle is waged for the attainment of goal. As Bipan Chandra puts it:

'The Indian national movement … is the only movement where the broadly Gramscian theoretical perspective of a war of position was successfully practised; where state power was not seized in a single historical moment of revolution, but through prolonged popular struggle on a moral, political and ideological level; where reserves of counter-hegemony were built up over the years through progressive stages; where the phases of struggle alternated with "passive" phases.'

This struggle was not violent because the nationalist leaders were concerned with fighting against imperialism as well as welding India into a nation. In the course of a protracted struggle fought at both intellectual and political levels, the nationalist leaders wished to show that the colonial rule was not beneficial to the Indian people nor was it invincible. The Gandhian non-violence also is now re-interpreted. Thus, it was not considered as 'a mere dogma of Gandhiji nor was it dictated by the interests of the propertied classes. It was an essential part of a

movement whose strategy involved the waging of a hegemonic struggle based on a mass movement which mobilized the people to the widest possible extent.' The national movement was now conceived as an all-class movement which provided space and opportunity for any class to build its hegemony. Moreover, the main party, the Congress, is now regarded not as a party but a movement. In this way, Bipan Chandra now makes a clear break from the conventional Marxist interpretation of the Indian national movement.

Sumit Sarkar presents another famous Marxist interpretation of the national movement which is at variance with and critical of Dutt-Desai view. In his first book, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (1973), he terms it as a 'simplistic version of the Marxian class-approach'. He criticises its contention that the moderate phase was dominated by the 'big bourgeoisie' while the extremist phase by the 'urban petty bourgeoisie'. Instead, he argues that 'a clear class-differential between moderate and extremist would still be very difficult to establish, and was obviously nonexistent at the leadership level'. He thinks that this version of Marxist interpretation suffers from the 'defect of assuming too direct or crude an economic motivation for political action and ideals'. According to him, the actions of the nationalist leaders could be better understood by using Trotsky's concept of 'substitutism' whereby the intelligentsia acts 'repeatedly as a kind of proxy for as-yet passive social forces with which it had little organic connection'. He also uses Gramscian categories of 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals. According to Antonio Gramsci, the famous Italian Marxist activist and thinker, the 'organic' intellectuals participate directly in the production-process and have direct links with the people whom they lead. The 'traditional' intellectuals, on the other hand, are not directly connected with either the production-process or the people. However, they become leaders of particular classes by ideologically assuming the responsibility of those classes. Sarkar thinks that the leaders of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal who came mostly from 'the traditional learned castes' and were not associated with commerce and industry particularly after the 1850s, and can be thought as 'traditional intelligentsia' in Gramscian sense. They were not the Gramscian organic intellectuals who generally emerge from the same classes which they lead. This view is quite close to that of Bipan Chandra so far as there is an emphasis on the role of ideology in the formation of the early nationalist leadership. Sumit Sarkar considers that even though the early nationalist leaders were not directly associated with the bourgeoisie, they objectively played a role in paving 'the way for the independent capitalist development of our country'. In another article, 'The Logic of Gandhian Nationalism' (1985), he goes further to argue that the objective stance of the Swadeshi Movement in favour of the bourgeoisie later gets transformed into direct intervention by the bourgeoisie and the subjective position taken in the interests of the capitalists by the leaders of the Civil Disobedience Movement. By studying the social forces involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the developments leading to the Gandhi-Irwin pact, he concludes that there was 'the vastly enhanced role of distinctively bourgeois groups, both in contributing heavily to the initial striking power of Civil Disobedience and ultimately in its calling off'. He qualifies his statement by saying that Gandhi was 'no mere bourgeois tool in any simplistic or mechanical sense' and that he can hardly be considered as 'a puppet' in the hands of the capitalists. He, however, insists that the Gandhian leadership had 'a certain coincidence of aims with Indian business interests at specific points' and 'an occasional significant coincidence of subjective attitudes and inhibitions with bourgeois interests'.

The Marxist perspective on Indian nationalism is, therefore, is informed by a class approach related to politics and ideology. The basic position is that the nationalist leadership and the nationalist ideology objectively and / or subjectively represented the Indian bourgeoisie and wanted that India should evolve on the path of independent capitalist development.

3.5 SUMMARY

The colonialist view on Indian nation and nationalism disregarded the possibility of India ever becoming a nation. It, moreover, considered the national movement as a movement of narrow self-interest led by a microscopic English-educated minority. According to this view, this small middle-class section of the population would never be able to form a nation out of the disparate assemblage of innumerable castes, linguistic and regional groups.

The nationalist historians strongly reacted against this negative characterisation of Indian people. They completely rejected the colonialist idea that India could never be formed into a nation. In fact, as many of them argued, India always possessed the potential to be forged into a nation, and it did happen at several points in the past. Although they did not deny the role of modern Western ideas, many of these historians argued that India had an underlying cultural unity since the most ancient times. The nationalist historians also regarded the national movement as a pan-Indian movement encompassing all classes and groups led by idealist and selfless leaders.

The Marxist historians argued against both of them. Their analysis of the national movement was based on an understanding of the role of economic factors and classes in the making of the nation as well as a movement. According to them, although the national movement was an expression of the basic antagonism between the Indian people and imperialist government, it was a movement either directly influenced by bourgeoisie or indirectly working in the direction of capitalist development. Thus, even though various classes and groups were involved in the movement, it ultimately served the fundamental interests of the Indian bourgeois classes.

3.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the main differences between the colonialist and nationalist views on Indian nation and national movement.

2) What are the basic points of the Marxist historiography on Indian nationalism?

3) In what ways the views of Bipan Chandra and Sumit Sarkar are different from those of R.P. Dutt and A.R. Desai?

UNIT 4 PERSPECTIVES ON INDIAN NATIONALISM–II*

Structure

4.1 Introduction

4.2 The Cambridge School on Indian Nationalism

4.3 The *Subaltern Studies*

4.4 Some Other Views

4.5 Summary

4.6 Exercises

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last Unit we discussed some major views on Indian nationalism – the colonialist, nationalist, and Marxist. In this Unit we will discuss some other views which are also of crucial significance so far as the interpretation of the national movement is concerned. A consideration of all these perspectives is aimed towards illustrating the point that not only was nationalism a complex phenomenon but also that history-writing is an intricate exercise informed by varying ideological and political practices.

4.2 THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL ON INDIAN NATIONALISM

As the term indicates, the 'Cambridge School' was the name given to a group of historians mostly working in the Cambridge University. Their works during the 1960s and 1970s advanced a certain point of view which resembled in many ways some of the ideas of the colonialist historiography and which was in opposition to the nationalist and Marxist approaches. The 'Cambridge view' was offered as an alternative explanation of the Indian nationalism. It sought to completely debunk the Indian national movement against the colonial rule led by leaders who had put their faith in the nationalist ideology. While both the nationalist and Marxist historians argued that Indian nationalism evolved as a result of the contradiction between Indian people and imperialism, the historians associated with the Cambridge School asserted that there was no real contradiction between imperialism and the Indian people and the central contradiction lay among the Indians themselves.

The Cambridge School had its precursor in the writings of John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson who, in their various works such as 'Imperialism of Free Trade' (1953), *Africa and the Victorians* (1961) and 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism' (1972), argued that colonialism was the result of internal political weakness of the Asian and African regimes which then collaborated with the Europeans for setting up the colonial rules. They, thus, emphasized on the continuity from pre-colonial to colonial periods and stressed the collaborative role of the natives. Gallagher's student Anil Seal, in his early work on India titled *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968), argued that it was the English

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education which created a new middle class which clamoured for political representation. The British obliged them by offering posts in various institutions, such as universities, and seats in municipal councils and later in provincial assemblies. However, the claimants were many while the posts were few. This led to intense rivalry among the elite, particularly at regional levels because that is where the new avenues were open. Seal asserted that there was no conflict between the British and the Indians or between imperialist rule and the Indian people. Instead, the main contradiction was among the Indians, particularly among the educated elite, on the basis of caste, community and religion. He argued that

'Much attention has been paid to the apparent conflicts between imperialism and nationalism; it would be at least equally profitable to study their real partnerships. Both British rule and Indian enterprise had a hand in bringing these [nationalist] mobilisations about' [Anil Seal 1968: 342].

In opposition to the Marxist historians, Seal argued that Indian nationalism was not the product of 'any class demand or as the consequence of any sharp changes in the structure of the economy'. He asserted that the emergence and growth of Indian nationalism can be comprehended by 'a conceptual system based on elites, rather than on classes'. During the colonial era, there was intense competition among the elites for posts and positions offered by colonial regime. But such rivalries took place 'between caste and caste, community and community, not between class and class'. Most of these mobilisations were horizontal, based on prescriptive identities such as caste and religion. In this sense, the Indian nationalism 'did not square with…the genuine nationalisms of nineteenth-century Europe' [ibid: 341]. Moreover, the so-called struggles which the Indian National Congress waged against the colonial rule were fake:

'Many of the battles which the Raj and the Congress waged were mere feints between two sides each held back by the unreliable troops in its own front line. Non-co-operation, Civil Disobedience, the new constitution, the clashes of 1942 were all parts of this strange struggle between impotent rivals, a Dasehra duel between two hollow statues, locked in motionless and simulated combat. Towards the end, when they had come to control their own allies, the Muslim League broke up this mimic warfare, and at once a real ferocity appeared—between Indian and Indian' [ibid: 351].

The leaders who led the Indian nationalist movement were all disgruntled people whose self-interest had not been met. Thus, according to Seal, Dadabhai Naoroji was raising the issues about drain of wealth and Indian impoverishment solely from the motive to keep himself in comfort in London.

Later, the historians of this trend shifted from the idea of horizontal mobilisation around caste and community to vertical mobilisation around factions. These factions are vertically organised structures of patron-client relationship operational in the localities and controlled by local magnates. The local struggles 'were seldom marked by the alliance of landlord with landlord, peasant with peasant, educated with educated, Muslim with Muslim and Brahmin with Brahmin. More frequently, Hindus worked with Muslims, Brahmins were hand in glove with non-Brahmins; and notables organized their dependents as supporters, commissioned professional men as spokesmen and turned government servants into aides' [Anil Seal 1973: 323].

These factions extended their reach to the towns and cities by employing the lawyers and politicians to serve their causes. Instead of the regions and the country, the localities were projected as the main centres of power. These vertically organised factions cut across the boundaries of caste, class, religion and region, and they were the most important factors in Indian politics, including the nationalist politics. Although the Cambridge School still considered that the desire for collaboration with the colonial regime was the predominant motive behind politics among Indians, it was no longer about education or conflict among the elites. It was now the competition for getting seats in various representative institutions such as municipalities and provincial assemblies which were thrown open by the British to the Indians. And this battle was now fought at the level of localities. It was, thus, the locality which controlled the Indian politics, the region (provinces) and the nation were secondary to it. The British had to concede to 'the existence of a legal underworld where the private justice of faction settled conflicts with the blows of lathis, or where, at the best, the strong could get their own way in the courts. In the mythology of empire, the age of Elphinstone, Munro and Thomason seems one of heroic social engineering; but under the pinnacles of their Raj lay a ground-floor reality where Indians battled with Indians, sometimes for the favours of the district officer, sometimes to do each other down without reference to him and his book of rules. At these levels, it might be the British who governed, but it was Indians who ruled' [ibid: 328-29].

According to the Cambridge historians, the British colonial government was the first and the most important motor of change in Indian subcontinent. The emergence and growth of Indian nationalist movement took place within the constitutional, administrative and political matrix created by it. Right from the beginning the Indians were needed to man the lower rungs of administration, but very few Indians were in the decision-making process. Beginning in the later nineteenth century, however, certain constitutional measures at the local, regional and provincial levels gave opportunity to the Indians to participate in policy-making. The two World Wars and the Great Depression compelled the government to economize at the administrative and legislative levels, leading to the devolution of power. The 1919 and 1935 constitutional and political reforms allowed Indians to hold some amount of real power at the provincial level on the basis of a much expanded electorate. To properly take advantage of the opportunities offered by the British withdrawal from the administrative and legislative posts, the competing Indians developed broader networks than was hitherto done. Nationalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric was adopted for what were basically related to local issues. The local issues and factions were crucial to understand the wider linkages cutting across the localities and provinces. The regional and national leaders worked in the interests of the local bosses. Even the national organisations, such as the Congress and the Muslim League, contained factions within it whose levers were in the hands of local magnates. In this world of politics, the leaders were not driven by ideology but by pursuit of power. All individuals, all leaders and their followers, in all places were driven by personal self-interest consisting of search for power and resources. All talks of ideology and transforming society were mere facade behind which naked game of power was played out. [See, S.B. Upadhyay 2015].

The basic thesis of the Cambridge School was reflected in a series of articles published in the journal *Modern Asian Studies* and collected in the volume, *Locality, Province and Nation* (1973). Besides, there were several books published by these writers which put forward the basic arguments of the School: Gordon

Johnson's *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1890 to 1905* (1973); C.A. Bayly's *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad 1880 –1920* (1975); D.A. Washbrook's *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: Madras Presidency 1870 –1920* (1976); C.J. Baker's *The Politics of South India 1920 –1937*(1976); B..R. Tomlinson's *The Indian National Congress and the Raj 1929 –* 1942 (1976); and C. J. Baker, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (eds.), *Power, Profit and Politics* (1981).

4.3 THE *SUBALTERN STUDIES*

During the closing decades of the last century, the scholars associated with the journal *Subaltern Studies* shot into fame by vehemently criticising all other forms of Indian history-writing. They put forward their own interpretation of the modern Indian history as a whole, particularly of Indian nationalism. Beginning in the early 1980s, with the publication of the first volume of *Subaltern Studies* (in 1982), this trend of interpretation of Indian nationalism became quite influential among certain sections of Indian historians. It was declared to be a radical departure in modern Indian historiography which claimed to dissociate from all earlier views on Indian national movement. In what can be called the manifesto of the project, Ranajit Guha, in the very first volume of the *Subaltern Studies*, declared that 'The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism.' According to Guha, all types of elitist histories have one thing in common and that is the absence of the politics of the people from their accounts. He criticised the three main trends in Indian historiography – i) colonialist, which saw the colonial rule as the fulfillment of a mission to enlighten the ignorant people; ii) nationalist, which visualised all the protest activities as parts of the making of the nation-state; and iii) Marxist, which subsumed the people's struggles under the progression towards revolution and a socialist state. According to him, there are no attempts in these works to understand and write about the way in which the subaltern groups view the world and practice their politics. Earlier historians were criticised for ignoring the popular initiative and accepting the official negative characterisation of the rebel and the rebellion.

In his essay 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', Ranajit Guha launched a scathing attack on the existing peasant and tribal histories in India for considering the peasant rebellions as 'purely spontaneous and unpremediated affairs' and for ignoring the consciousness of the rebels themselves. He accused all the accounts of rebellions, starting with the immediate official reports to the histories written by the left radicals, of writing the texts of counter-insurgency which refused to recognise the agency of the people and 'to acknowledge the insurgent as the subject of his own history'. According to Guha, they all failed to acknowledge that there existed a parallel subaltern domain of politics which was not influenced by the elite politics and which possessed an independent, self-generating dynamics. Its roots lay in pre-colonial popular social and political structures. However, this domain was not archaic: 'As modern as indigenous elite politics, it was distinguished by its relatively greater depth in time as well as in structure'. In his view, there was now an urgent requirement for setting the record straight by viewing the history from the point-of-view of the subaltern classes. The politics of the people was crucial because it constituted an autonomous domain which 'neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter'. The people's politics differed from the elite politics in several crucial aspects.

For one, its roots lay in the traditional organisations of the people such as caste and kinship networks, tribal solidarity, territoriality, etc. Secondly, while elite mobilisations were vertical in nature, people's mobilisations were horizontal. Thirdly, whereas the elite mobilisation was legalistic and pacific, the subaltern mobilisation was relatively violent. Fourthly, the elite mobilisation was more cautious and controlled while the subaltern mobilisation was more spontaneous.

The Subaltern historians, disenchanted with the Congress nationalism and its embodiment in the Indian state, rejected the thesis that popular mobilisation was the result of either economic conditions or initiatives from the top. They claimed to have discovered a popular autonomous domain which was opposed to the elite domain of politics. This domain of the subaltern was defined by perpetual resistance and rebellion against the elite. The subaltern historians also attributed a general unity to this domain clubbing together a variety of heterogeneous groups such as tribes, peasantry, proletariat and, occasionally, the middle classes as well. Moreover, this domain was said to be almost completely uninfluenced by the elite politics and was claimed to posses an independent, self-generating dynamics. The charismatic leadership was no longer viewed as the chief force behind a movement. It was instead the people's interpretation of such charisma which acquired prominence in analysis of a movement.

This idea is present in most of the early contributions to the series. Gyanendra Pandey, in 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism' (*SS I*), argues that peasant movement in Awadh arose before and independently of the Non-cooperation movement. According to him, peasants' understanding of the local power structure and its alliance with colonial power was more advanced than that of the Congress leaders. In fact, the peasant militancy was reduced wherever the Congress organisation was stronger. In Stephen Henningham's account of the 'Quit India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces' (*SS II*), the elite and the subaltern domains were clearly distinguished from each other. He talks of two movements existing together but parallel to each other – 'an elite uprising', started by '*the high caste rich peasants and small landlords who dominated the Congress*', and a 'subaltern rebellion' powered by '*the poor, low caste people of the region*'.

Shahid Amin, in his article 'Gandhi as Mahatma' (in *SS III*), studies the popular perception of Mahatma Gandhi. He shows that the popular perception and actions were completely at variance with the Congress leaders' perception of Gandhi. Although the Mahatma's messages were spread widely through 'rumours', there was an entire philosophy of economy and politics behind it – the need to become a good human being, to give up drinking, gambling and violence, to take up spinning and to maintain communal harmony. The stories which circulated also emphasised the magical powers of Mahatma and his capacity to reward or punish those who obeyed or disobeyed him. On the other hand, the Mahatma's name and his supposed magical powers were also used to reinforce as well as establish caste hierarchies, to make the debtors pay and to boost the cow-protection movement. All these popular interpretations of the Mahatma's messages reached their climax during the Chauri Chaura incidents in 1922 when his name was invoked to burn the police post, to kill the policemen and to loot the market. David Hardiman, in his numerous articles, focused on subaltern themes and argued that whether it was the tribal assertion in South Gujarat, or the Bhil movement in Eastern Gujarat, or the radicalism of the agricultural workers during the Civil Disobedience Movement, there was an independent politics of the subaltern classes against the elites.

Similarly, Sumit Sarkar, in 'The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy' (*SS III*), argues that the Non-cooperation movement in Bengal 'revealed a picture of masses outstripping leaders…and the popular initiative eventually alarmed leaders into calling for a halt'. Thus, 'the subaltern groups…formed a relatively autonomous political domain with specific features and collective mentalities which need to be explored, and that this was a world distinct from the domain of the elite politicians who in early twentieth century Bengal came overwhelmingly from high-caste educated professional groups connected with zamindari or intermediate tenure-holding'.

Thus we see that in these and in many other essays in the earlier volumes, an attempt was made to separate the elite and the subaltern domains and to establish the autonomy of subaltern consciousness and action. This phase was generally characterised by emphasis on subaltern themes and autonomous subaltern consciousness. The subalternist historians forcefully asserted that both the colonial ideology and the bourgeois nationalist ideology failed to establish their hegemony over the subaltern domain. Moreover, the Indian bourgeoisie failed in its prime work of speaking for the nation, and the Congress nationalism was bourgeois and elite which restrained popular radicalism.

A few years after its inauguration as advocates of people's voice in history and proponents of an autonomous subaltern political domain, the project of *Subaltern Studies* underwent significant changes. Under postmodernist and postcolonialist influences, many of its contributors began to question its earlier emphasis on autonomous subaltern consciousness. Gayatri Spivak, in particular, criticised the humanist viewpoint adopted by the earlier trend within *Subaltern Studies*. At another level, the idea of subalternity became much wider to include even the colonial elite as they were considered subaltern vis-à-vis the imperialist rulers, the phenomenon being termed by Partha Chatterjee as 'subalternity of the elite'. Chatterjee's influential book, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986), derived from the postcolonial framework of Edward Said which considered the colonial power-knowledge as overwhelming and irresistible. His later book, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1995), carries this analysis even further.

Subalternity as a concept was also redefined. Earlier, it stood for the oppressed classes in opposition to the dominant classes both inside and outside. Later, it was conceptualised in opposition to colonialism, modernity and Enlightenment. The earlier emphasis on the 'subaltern' now gave way to a focus on 'community'. Earlier the elite nationalism was stated to hijack the people's initiatives for its own project; now the entire project of nationalism was declared to be only a version of colonial discourse with its emphasis on centralisation of movement, and later of the state. The ideas of secularism and enlightenment rationalism were attacked and there began an emphasis on the 'fragments' and 'episodes'. Thus, the subaltern historiography on Indian nationalism went through two phases. [For further details on Subaltern School, see S.B. Upadhyay 2015].

4.4 SOME OTHER VIEWS

Although the interpretations of Indian nationalism as hitherto described hold sway, they do not cover all the approaches. According to Sugata Bose, the need is to move beyond the debates between 'secular statist and Subaltern fragmentalist histories'. It is because while 'the secular, statist historiography relegates religiously informed nationalism, especially of the Muslim variety, to the status of 'communalism', the subaltern, fragmentalist kind unduly privileges the

fragment constituted by the Bengali Hindu middle classes, almost equating it in the process with the whole of the Indian nation' [S. Bose 2001: 284, 291-2]. Here we will briefly discuss two books which offer a different interpretation of Indian nationalism from what we have discussed so far.

C.A. Bayly, in his *Origins of Nationality in South Asia* (1998), has argued that Indian nationalism was not an entirely modern product. It was built on the pre-existing indigenous ideas of territoriality, ethical government and public morality. Bayly traces the roots of regional patriotisms which existed before the onset of colonialism and which contributed significantly in the making of the modern Indian nationalism. He is critical of those scholars who consider Indian nationalism as basically a western product created in the late nineteenth century by the English-educated intelligentsia. According to him, patriotic sentiments in the subcontinent pre-dated the western influences, and 'an analogy to European patriotisms…before the French Revolution…could be found in the sentiment of attachment to land and political institutions which developed rapidly in some regional Indian homelands between 1400 and 1800'. Such ideas developed around the 'themes of perfect city, corporate kingship, humoural balance and good counsel'. Deriving from multiple sources (such as Hindu normative ideas, Greek and Islamic sources, and rational ideas of the Mughal elite), these ideas basically focused on particular regions and territories [C.A. Bayly 1998: 36].

Although Bayly does not entirely disagree with the view that 'much of modern Indian nationalist organisation and ideology was consciously or unconsciously derived from western exemplars, especially as it was reflected in the central organisations of the national struggle.' However, he emphasises that 'the particularities of Indian nationalism have to be understood in the context of Indian forms of social organisation and ideologies of good governance that pre-date the full western impact' [ibid. v]. According to him, the claim that Indian nationalism was completely a product of colonial times is a 'drastic foreshortening of history which is implied in many recent critiques of nationalist modernity'. He argues that a strong sense of patriotism, which bound many Indians to their homelands, had been present since the seventeenth century. They had taken collective action to protect their homelands from outside intrusion. Towards the period leading to the decline of the Mughal empire, strong nationalist sentiments developed in many regions. Several regions provide the earliest expressions of such feelings. In Maharashtra, there was 'a relatively strong and generalised Indian patriotism in which an emerging sense of commitment to regional culture coincided with the creation of a regional language and the formation of a relatively strong state' [ibid. 26]. This was 'a patriotism underpinned by language, devotional religion and economic integration' which 'was energized by an expanding state which promoted themes of war and remembrance' [ibid. 36]. In Rajasthan and Central India, the Rajput sense of solidarity and resistance to the Mughals gave rise to 'a sense of Rajput patriotism'. In Jat region, there was distinct sense of regional patriotism as the population in this area fought against the Mughals to protect their territorial space. In Telugu region in southern Deccan, a strong sense of 'Telugu ethnicity' had emerged as early as between 1400 and 1600. Further south, a sense of Mysorean patriotic identity was forged by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. Even in other regions, such as Bengal and Tamil Nadu, forms of patriotism could be found which defined the community. These forms of patriotism were different from various other pre-colonial bonds such as those formed around religion, sect, and caste. These patriotic sentiments helped the later reformist and nationalist ideologies and associations which emerged in the nineteenth century.

Rajat Ray, like Bayly, is critical of those theorists who consider that Indian nationalism was entirely a modern product, constructed from the discourses derived from Europe. He discusses the multiple social, religious and political bonds which gave rise to a common culture and mentality and thus created a 'felt community', a sense of Indianness, much before the advent of modern nationalism. This 'felt community' encompassed both the Hindus and the Muslims and transcended the barriers of regions. He argues that, although the idea of a larger community in pre-modern times was different from the modern idea of nation-state, there was a cultural community which cut across the regional, religious and caste boundaries. Ray insists that broader community, even 'national', bonds existed before the colonial period. The resistance by the remnants of the Mughal state to the increasingly assertive East India Company showed a broader attachment towards previous social and political order. Even more importantly, the various rebellions since the onset of the colonial rule culminating in the Revolt of 1857 showed a common bond among people and their allegiance to a territorial state. He argues:

'At the instinctual level of the collective mentality, it was the violent protest of a black subject people against their white oppressors. . . It was not, however, the rebels who put the struggle in terms of a war between the races. .... At the level of conscious thought, they clothed the underlying race war in the ideological garb of a struggle between the true religions and the false one. The joint brotherhood of the religions expressed, in so far as they were capable of expressing it, the instinctive feeling that the native subject race constituted one people as against the white Christian rulers.'

The search for the roots of Indian national identity in the pre-colonial state forms, societies, and composite cultures in different parts of the subcontinent present a new perspective which is different from the mainstream understanding of Indian nationalism.

4.5 SUMMARY

Like nationalism in other countries, the Indian nationalism has also been subject to varying interpretations. In this Unit, two important trends of interpretation – the Cambridge School and the Subaltern School – have been discussed. While the Cambridge School historians try to debunk the phenomenon of Indian nationalism and question the idea of selfless leaders, the Subaltern historians question the official narrative of Indian nationalism. But the Subaltern historians underline the existence of a strong popular nationalism which was autonomous and more militant than the organised and official nationalism. Besides these interpretations, we have also briefly discussed another trend which points towards the presence of strong patriotic and even national sentiments in pre-colonial India.

4.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the interpretation of Indian nationalism given by the Cambridge School.

2) How do the Subaltern historians view the phenomenon of Indian nationalism?

3) Briefly discuss the view of C.A. Bayly and Rajat Ray on Indian nationalism.

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Block

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BLOCK 2 THE FORMATIVE PHASE

Introduction

A variety of intellectual and political activities during the second half of the nineteenth century prepared the ground for the rise of organised nationalism. Formation of provincial associations, racist inclinations of the colonial regime, legacy of the revolt of 1857 as well as many later popular rebellions and intellectual stirrings in favour of reform and nationalism laid the foundations of nationalism in India. **Unit 5** will introduce you to the details of this process.

One of the most important forms of intellectual oppositions to the colonial rule was the idea of economic nationalism. It was fervently argued by the Indian nationalists that colonialism was based on economic exploitation of India, that Indian wealth was carried abroad showing the basically foreign character of the British rule, that indigenous industries were eliminated through the invasion of Indian markets by machine-made British goods, that Indians were forced to act as cannon-fodders in the wars which were primarily waged for British colonial expansion, and Indian peasants were intensely exploited by the unbending colonial revenue policies. Such ideas slowly became widespread influencing a large number of Indians strengthening anti-colonial nationalism. We have discussed these ideas in **Unit 6**.

Unit 7 analyses the processes of intellectual and social opposition to colonialism, particularly among Indian intelligentsia. Cosmopolitanism, rationalism, religious universalism, defence of tradition, even mimicry were in different ways creating conditions to resist the intellectual and cultural advance of colonialism.

As various anti-colonial ideas accumulated and spread over decades and as popular resistance to colonial rule formed, we witness the emergence of a unified nationalist movement in the form of Swadeshi movement. Its strongest impact was felt in Bengal, but it was also present in many other parts of India. In **Unit 8**, you will learn about the emergence, growth and then decline of this movement.

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UNIT 5 FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN NATIONALISM*

Structure

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Legacy of Popular Revolts

5.3 Intellectual Awakening

5.4 Provincial Political Associations

5.5 British Administrative Measures

5.6 Foundation of Indian National Congress

5.7 Interpretations of Historians

5.8 Summary

5.9 Exercises

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit introduces you to the process of 'political awakening' in India in the second half of nineteenth century leading to the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885. The great revolt of 1857 is considered as the culmination of popular discontentment against British rule and also marked the beginning of a long drawn struggle against British imperialism. In the presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, where the British first established its foothold, the new intelligentsia who were the beneficiaries of western education became critical of the exploitative character of the colonial rule. Initiatives to form provincial political associations first came from this elite section of society. Although in different parts of India the tribal people and the peasantry raised their voices against imperialism, there was no unity of purpose. The process of political mobilisation took a definite shape in the second half of nineteenth century. In this Unit we are going to discuss the impact of popular revolts in the development of new political consciousness and the role of educated Indians in mobilising public opinion. We would familiarise you with the political developments of this period leading to the rise of Indian nationalism. You would also learn about the formation of various provincial associations, British administrative measures in 1870s and 1880s contributing towards the growth of anti-British opinion and the foundation of Indian National Congress. You would also get an idea about how historians have interpreted the beginning of Indian nationalism.

5.2 LEGACY OF POPULAR REVOLTS

The primary object of British rule was to expand and protect the interests of Britain in India. In fulfilling its mission in India various policies adopted by British government in economic, political and social spheres gave birth to discontent against British rule and the idea of pan-Indian nationalism. The first hundred years of British rule witnessed the plunder of India's resources causing major famines in India. Famines were certainly not new in India but natural

* Resource Person: Prof. Swaraj Basu

calamities caused these famines. During British rule famines were man made because of exploitative policy of British government. The new land revenue system, commercialisation of agriculture, drain of wealth, and de-industrialisation adversely affected the peasants and the tribal people who revolted in many parts of India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Beginning with the Sanyasi and Fakir rebellions in 1760s in Bengal till the Santhal rebellion of 1850s in the Bhagalpur-Rajmahal area, India witnessed about 100 rebellions involving different sections of Indian society. These rebellions were not centrally organised, nor there was a centralised leadership, nor they succeeded in arresting the expansion of British rule but these rebellions definitely conveyed the feelings of Indians towards British rule. The challenge that these rebellions put to British rule helped in creating awareness about exploitative nature of foreign rule and in developing anti-British sentiments.

The great revolt of 1857 is seen as the outburst of accumulated anger of dispossessed princes, disgruntled soldiers and aggrieved peasantry. Describing this great revolt as the mutiny of sepoys simplifies the complexity of issues involved in raising the banner of revolt by diverse groups of Indians. In the process of extracting maximum land revenues traditional landed aristocracy lost powers and privileges and the peasantry came under the burden of heavy taxes. By promoting British goods British rule caused serious hardship to the artisans and handicraftsmen. So the banner of revolt raised by the sepoys soon took the character of a civil rebellion having support from landed aristocracy, peasants, artisans and others. The British succeeded in suppressing the revolt, but the revolt succeeded in generating a powerful expression of nationalist sentiment which was yet to take an organised shape. The anti-British sentiments became so strong among Indians that even those who were the beneficiaries of British rule in India started criticising its repressive policies. Exemplary courage and sacrifice of lives by rebels soon became legends and gave birth to a sense of strong patriotism.

The spirit of protests against exploitation continued after 1857 and the indigo cultivators' resistance to the oppressive system of indigo cultivation by all European planters turned into a major revolt in 1859-60 in the province of Bengal. *Neel Darpan* written by Din Bandhu Mitra portrayed the oppression of indigo planters. Against their wishes peasants were forced to cultivate indigo for the benefit of planters. The administration being supportive of planters the peasants were left with no option to complain against extortion, flogging and other forms of tyranny except to revolt against planters. Servants of the East India Company were involved in plundering of wealth and it is argued that this caused the famine of 1770 in Bengal leading to massive starvation death. Exorbitant rent, forced cultivation, seizure of crops and cattle forced peasants to raise voice against the oppression and the eastern part of Bengal witnessed massive agrarian unrest during the second half of nineteenth century. In 1873 peasants organised agrarian league in Pabna district in Eastern Bengal and mobilised peasants to stop payment of rents to zamindars. Peasant discontent forced the government to pass Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885 to protect tenants. The new intelligentsia in Bengal represented by Bankim Chandra Chatterjea, R.C. Dutt, Surendranath Banerjea and others expressed their solidarity in support of tenants. In 1875 peasants in Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur, Satara of Maharashtra gave a call for social boycott of moneylenders and later on peasant resistance turned into agrarian riots. Peasant resistance succeeded in compelling the government to enact the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 as a token protection against moneylenders.

Peasants in Malabar, Punjab and other parts of India were forced to raise voice against exploitation and deprivation in the course of nineteenth century. In the absence of any organised leadership and definite ideology peasant movements during this period might not have directly challenged British rule but the courage and consciousness shown by peasants had definite influence in shaping public opinion against colonialism. The new Indian intelligentsia was very much touched by the miseries of peasants and in the writings of nineteenth century this concern for peasants was reflected. The various popular revolts paved the ground for the growth of new political consciousness against British rule.

5.3 INTELLECTUAL AWAKENING

In 1817 with the establishment of the Hindu college at Calcutta Indian elite, belonging mostly to upper caste Hindus, got opportunity to learn English language and western science. English was made the official language in place of Persian language in 1835 and the rising elite saw in learning English the key to power under British regime. Lord Macaulay, known for his report on education in India, was a firm believer in the superiority of western education and wanted to train Indians in western education who would speak the rulers' language. This was followed by the famous report of Sir Charles Wood developing a framework of the colonial government's education policy in 1854 which led to the setting up of first three Indian universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. The new colonial education empowered a section of Indians with a graduate degree making them eligible for government employment. But the new graduates with ambition very soon found them left out in the race for coveted administrative posts in government. There were competitions within Indian elites for shares of power and resources. It is argued that a sense of frustration due to limited employment opportunity gave birth to anti-British sentiments. One may not fully agree with the argument that the frustration of educated Indians made them nationalist but there was a visible change in attitude of educated Indians towards British rule in the second half of nineteenth century. In the initial years of British rule educated Indians were generally appreciative of the beneficial aspects of colonial rule and looked towards the west for new ideas and scientific education. The trend began to change from the second half of nineteenth century after realising the exploitative nature of colonial rule and the growing misery of Indian masses. Racist arrogance and denial of equal rights to Indians further alienated educated Indians and contributed towards the development of consciousness as Indian nation. Liberal, democratic and egalitarian ideas of the west opened the eyes of educated Indians to become critics of British domination and influenced them to look back to Indian civilisation for its unique power of assimilation. The period since 1860s witnessed significant increase in the literary production in vernacular languages. Through pamphlets and novels written during this period in vernacular languages a new interest was generated to rediscover India's golden past, particularly preceding the Muslim invasions. As against authoritarian and individualistic features of British rule effort was made to search for democratic, unifying values in Indian tradition. 'Indians in the important provinces of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras did not join the Mutiny. However, education, the press, and European racism and economic oppression were arousing a new political consciousness. Both the Mutiny of 1857 and the indigo peasant disturbances in 1859-60 contributed to this awakening in Bengal'. (John R. McLane, *The Political Awakening in India*, 1970, p.30). Vernacular press was also developing with

great importance and had great influence in shaping Indian opinion against British rule. One can make out the impact of vernacular press in influencing public opinion from the following testimony given by Reverend James Long before the Indigo Commission in 1860.

'The vernacular press is rising into great importance, as a genuine exponent of native opinion, and it is to be regretted that the European community pays so little regard to its admonitions and warnings. It is the index of the native mind. In 1853, I visited Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow, and particularly examined the statistics connected with the vernacular press, in the upper provinces, and I remember the impression with which I left, after I had been through its lanes and gullies, exploring the localities of its vernacular presses. I felt then very strongly, how little the Europeans of Delhi and other cities were aware of the prodigious activity of the vernacular periodical press, and the impression it was evidently producing on the native mind as tested by the avidity with which books, treating on native and political subjects, were purchased…Bengali newspapers, such as the *Bhaskar* and *Probhakur* are circulated widely even as far as the Punjab, for wherever Bengalis go …they keep up a correspondence with each other in their own language and read their native papers. Thus on a visit to Benares, three years ago, I was in a part, called the Bengali-tolla, inhabited almost entirely by Bengalis, who used the Bengali language. Two Bengali newspapers were printed there. These Bengali newspapers have mofussil [rural] correspondents, who give them the news of the district, and to each Bengali newspaper is attached a translator of English newspapers; hence the native mind is much more familiarised with political movements both in Europe and India. ..

'The amlas [agents] of the courts, the state of the police, the character of magistrates are constant subjects of criticism in those papers. I remember reading sixteen years ago, a series of powerful articles in the *Bhaskar*, exposing with the most caustic wit, the abuses of the courts…I calculate that though native papers have a limited numerical circulation in the Mofussil [rural districts], yet each paper is probably read by from five to ten natives, and the information in it is orally communicated to a far wider sphere… the practice of Hindoos to have one person at night to read to a large number; and the power of communicating information orally, is a well paid profession among a class of Hindoos called *kathaks*. I have been present at an assembly where three hundred males, and more than one hundred females behind the *purdah*, were listening to an eloquent discourse in Bengali by a *kathak* for one hour and a half; and during that time, the attention was so profound, that the dropping of a pice [small coin] could be heard.

'Nor are the popular songs of Bengalis sung at these assemblies always confined to subjects of love and religion, they occasionally touch on politics; for instance, on the appointment of indigo planters as honorary magistrates, strong feelings of indignation were excited among natives, but especially among ryots.' [Cited in John, R. McLane, *The Political Awakening in India*, 1970, pp.32-36].

After reading the above text, the point to be noted is the importance of vernacular press in creating awareness about the abject misery of indigo cultivators. Educated Indians' concern for poor cultivators and their criticism of British rule helped in shaping public opinion against British rule. More important is the fact that oral traditions helped in creating awareness about exploitative nature of British rule

among common masses. Folk songs and local forms of drama were used in exposing the misdeeds of British rule. The dawn of new political consciousness among Indians soon became visible with the emergence of a number of political associations.

5.4 PROVINCIAL POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

The formation of political associations to put forward demands of Indians to British government marked the beginning of new political consciousness of Indians. The new intelligentsia played significant role in these associations. The intelligentsia did not initially question the legitimacy of the continuation of British rule, but by 1870s their faith in British governance was shaken because of several famines caused by British rule. Dadabhai Naoroji and Ramesh Chunder Dutt strongly criticised economic exploitation of India by British rule. It is argued that as the Charter of English East India Company was going to expire in 1853 and British officials were reviewing conditions in India before the renewal of the Charter so the educated Indians took this opportunity to form provincial associations to put forward their demands. The British Indian Association was founded in Calcutta in 1851, formed by Zamindars of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, was the earliest public organisation to mobilise people for the political cause. Before the setting up of British Indian Association there were the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society in Calcutta. The Landholders' Society was active in protecting the interest of landlords, whereas the Bengal British India Society was more broad based in its aim by focusing on the rights of peasants also. The British Indian Association with members from landed gentry and new intelligentsia drew the attention of British authority through petitions to London and local authorities to protect the interests of Indians and give more share of public office for Indians. In Bombay, the Bombay Association (1852) and in Madras, Madras Native Association (1852) were formed with the objectives to appeal British parliament for protecting interests of Indians. 'Transcending the ties of family, caste, religion and locality…these associations were the first overt sign of a social and political revolution in the sub-continent.' [Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism,* p. 202].

In spite of repeated representations by the provincial associations the major grievances of Indians were not addressed and Indians continued in their demand for more representation of Indians in government services. After the great revolt of 1857 and the setting up of universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras political consciousness of Indians took a new turn. Being critical of limited approach of the British Indian Association young educated people in Bengal came forward to form the Indian League. The League wanted to broaden its base by involving masses and encouraging political education. Development of national unity was in its agenda. But best known and more active political association was Indian Association, established by the noted advocate Surendranath Banerjea in 1876 in Calcutta. Indian Association demanded the opening of Indian Civil Service to Indians and engaged in creating public opinion against various issues affecting interests of Indians. The association asked for elected Indian representatives in municipalities in which members were appointed by government and also organised public protest against the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. In Bombay the Bombay Presidency Association was formed in 1885 by Pherozeshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji and Kashinath Telang. The association took up local grievances

and through representations impressed upon British parliament for addressing their demands. In Poona, the Sarvajanik Sabha (1870), formed by the new intelligentsia became the platform for voicing political concerns and M. G. Ranade was its guiding force. It demanded Indian representation in parliament and protested publicly against the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. The Sabha was also concerned of agrarian problems and intervened to settle agrarian disputes. In Madras, first it was Madras Native Association (1852) and then P. Ananda Charlu and others established Madras Mahajana Sabha (1884) to draw attention of the government to various problems faced by local people. All these provincial associations which came up after 1850s in spite of having its limited social base and limited objectives marked the beginning of the process of political awakening and gave momentum to political activity. These associations provided confidence to Indians to organise political opposition to the mighty British rulers.

5.5 BRITISH ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES

The great revolt of 1857, popular revolts against oppression faced by peasants and tribals, development of new political consciousness among Indians against British rule made the British rulers to think about administrative mechanism to stem the tide of anti-British opinion. The Indian Press, in English as well as in vernacular languages, during the period from 1860s to 1885 played a vital role in creating political consciousness of Indians. *Bengalee* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Bengal, *Kesari, Mahratta, Indu Prakash* and *Voice of India* in Bombay, *Hindu* in Madras, *Tribune* in Punjab and many other newspapers tried to educate people raising important issues and to spread ideas about political rights among the common people. Issues like racial discrimination, injustice to Indians, economic exploitation were highlighted to argue that British rule resulted in economic and intellectual subordination of Indians to Britain. To put a curb on this anti-British propaganda by the Indian Press, Lord Lytton, the Viceroy, passed the Vernacular Press Act in 1878. This was followed by the Arms Act which introduced a system of license to have firearms in India but the Europeans were exempted from it. This open discrimination infuriated Indian public opinion against British policy of victimisation. Lord Ripon, successor of Lord Lytton, made efforts to appease the educated Indians by repealing the Vernacular Press Act although no action was initiated to amend the Arms Act. More crucial was the Ilbert Bill which allowed an Indian magistrate to judge a European. This invoked strong criticism of the English population living in India which had racist overtones. The Bill was amended to pacify the Europeans but all these exposed the true character of British rule to Indians. 'The strength of English feeling and the threat of a "white Mutiny" forced the government to compromise in 1884 and to permit Europeans to be tried by juries, at least half of whose members would be European. In the Ilbert Bill controversy, nationalists saw a crude racism which was normally hidden behind the impersonality of institutions and the walls of private clubs.' [John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and The Early Congress*, p. 38]. Indians could realise the depth of British hostility to political reform in India. Ripon also thought of raising the age-limit of Indians for Indian Civil Service examination but most of the Viceroy's counselors opposed the increase in number of Indians in the civil service. Lord Ripon created hope among Indians but ultimately he could not succeed in bringing any major change to fulfill the expectations of Indians. Lord Dufferin who succeeded Lord Ripon took a very cautious approach towards new initiatives to fulfill aspirations of Indians. He was even hesitant of opening

up further employment opportunities for Indians in the civil service. Shrinking employment opportunities combined with repressive government measures pushed Indians further towards political mobilisation to make their voices heard. The shift in political thinking of Indians since 1870s was taken note of in a contemporary report which states:

'within the last…20 years…a feeling of nationality, which formerly had no existence…has grown up, and the…press can now, for the first time in the history of our rule, appeal to the whole native population of India against their foreign rulers. Twenty years ago…we had to take account of local nationalities and particular races. The resentment of the Maharatta did not involve that of the Bengalee…Now…we have changed all that and are beginning to find ourselves face to face, not with the population of individual provinces, but with 200 millions of people united by sympathies and intercourse which we have ourselves created and fostered. This seems…the great political fact of the day'. [Cited in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, pp.146-147].

The point to be noted here is that the measures introduced by the Viceroys in the period between 1870s and 1880s to strengthen British control over Indian empire in fact fanned the flames of political aspirations of Indians.

5.6 FOUNDATION OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

The efforts made by educated Indians at the provincial level to form associations with the aim of organising public opinion culminated in mobilising a national political conference of educated Indians. An Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume, a retired member of the Indian Civil Service was a major motivating force to bring the educated Indians who were active in provincial associations together to form one national political association. Hume wanted to have an all India representative body of educated Indians to voice their concerns on issues affecting them. Surendranath Banerjea also tried to make his Indian Association a broader platform by convening an all India conference of the association. But the initiative taken by Hume gave birth to the formation of the Indian National Congress and later on Surendranath joined the National Congress. In December 1885 seventy-two delegates all belonging to educated class living in the big cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Poona and Madras met in Bombay under the presidentship of W.C. Bonnerji, a noted Bengali lawyer. From its foundation onwards every year the Congress held annual conference in different cities and discussed issues which were of interest of educated elite Indians. Although Hume played a major role in the foundation of Indian National Congress by the early 1880s the idea of forming a national representative body was very much in discussion among educated Indians. The principal demands of the Congress in its initial years were the reform of the central and provincial legislative councils giving greater powers to Indians, Indianisation of the top-level administration, judicial reform, the spending of less money on war but none of their demands had mass appeal. Direct political agitation was not in its agenda rather the focus was on writing petitions, speeches and articles to impress upon English liberal opinion for reforms in India. One can get an idea of the aims of the Congress from the following words of Dadabhai: 'We are proceeding upon cautious and conservative lines to obtain definite developments of existing institutions in the changed state of things that British

rule and British education has brought about in India.' W.C. Bonnerji as the first president of the Indian National Congress stated that the Congress objective was the 'eradication, by direct friendly personal intercourse, of all possible race, creed, or provincial prejudices amongst all lovers of our country…the promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in our country's cause in (all) parts of the Empire.' [Cited in Bipan Chandra and others (ed.) *India's Struggle for Independence*, p.77]. In the context of the process of political awakening that was taking place since 1850s the early Congress leaders were primarily engaged in preparing the foundations of democratic movement at national level rather than giving call for any immediate radical action. But definitely the foundation of the Indian National Congress gave the Indians a platform of their own to carry forward the struggle against British rule.

5.7 INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORIANS

The foundation of Indian National Congress is generally considered as the first manifestation of organised nationalism in India and the beginning of a national political community in India. Historians have analysed the foundation of Indian nationalism and the formation of Indian National Congress from different perspectives. In this section we would like to introduce you to some of important researches done by historians. Anil Seal argues that because of differences in levels of progress in different provinces and differences in interests of Congress members coming from different social background it was difficult for the Congress to have common aims and national goal. He, commenting on the role played by Hume in the foundation of Indian National Congress, wrote,

'By the early 1880s the idea of a national representative body was being discussed in every Presidency of India, and there had already been a number of attempts to bring it into being. The 1885 Congress itself was one of several such attempts, and its organisation owed something to men in Bombay, Poona, Madras and Calcutta. It was not the work of Hume alone, although he had a hand in it. During Ripon's viceroyalty, Hume had made himself very useful as a sub-editor of Indian opinion and as an agent of Indian action. As such he was admirably suited to be one of the organisers of the Congress…It should be obvious that before the delegates assembled at Bombay, there was already a tendency to raise its activities to the all-India level. The repeated efforts in the early 1880s to form a united organization show that this tendency was growing stronger and stronger, and that the odds on one or other of these efforts succeeding were getting shorter. Congress was the experiment which, for reasons partly adventitious, was to survive'. [*The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, pp.272, 277].

C. A. Bayly has argued that for 'many local leaders, the congress was essentially a secondary organisation, and their association with it derived from the need to pursue within the regional and all-India skeleton of organization and aspiration the much more circumscribed local and sectional aims which derived from lower levels of politics'. [C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics, Allahabad, 1880-1920*, p.4]. Bayly's argument draws attention to regional diversity and the local interests in the genesis of nationalist politics undermining the ideological considerations of the Indian intelligentsia.

John R. McLane does not subscribe to the arguments of Seal and Bayly who underestimate common aims and ideology of the Congress giving more emphasis on individual and local interests. McLane writes:

'The Indian founders of the Congress were impressed by the nobility of a nationalist vision of subordinating the interests of self, family, and caste to the interests of an Indian nation. The Congress vision held that Indians shared fundamental economic and political interests, that those interests were in conflict with those of Britain, and that the collective welfare of all Indians could be improved by restructuring the relations between India and her foreign rulers. The first generation of Congress leaders was groping for a means of translating the vision into concrete political tactics. Congress leaders were sometimes diverted from this task by their personal careers. Nevertheless, the vision was potent, sincerely held, and widely shared'. [John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, pp.7-8].

Bipan Chandra and others in their book, *India's Struggle for Independence*, have argued that from the beginning India's national leaders understood the basic clash of interests between Indian people and British colonialism. The national movement under the Congress developed 'a clear-cut anti-colonial ideology'. The common struggle against colonialism promoted the spirit of nationalism and intellectuals helped in 'arousing the inherent, instinctive, nascent, anti-colonial consciousness of the masses.' The foundation of the Congress is seen as the 'culmination of a process of political awakening that had its beginnings in the 1860s and 1870s and took a major leap forward in the late 1870s and early 1880s'.

Depending on their ideological orientation historians have tried to interpret the foundation of Indian National Congress and the beginning of Indian nationalism. The crystallisation of what was essentially growing political consciousness at regional level into a common political platform to fight colonialism under the banner of Indian National Congress may be considered as the beginning of organised political movement at the national level. The Congress provided the platform for a variety of critiques of British rule in India. Membership being confined to educated middle class in its early years did not restrict its presence being felt by others, particularly its economic and political agenda.

5.8 SUMMARY

The British rule in India gave birth to a new political consciousness and the idea of nationhood and political rights. Being confronted with various forms of exploitation under British rule and the much visible racist attitude of the Anglo-Indians, the Indians felt the urge to raise voice against foreign rule. Indian intelligentsia being the beneficiary of western education played a key role in exposing the exploitative character of British rule and mobilising public opinion under one umbrella. You have seen how in different provinces people formed associations to deliberate on issues affecting their interests and this political consciousness ultimately paved the way for the formation of Indian National Congress. Early Congress leaders sensed the transformation of India under British rule and tried to build up an organised Indian opinion capitalising on the impact of British rule. Historians have analysed the foundation of Indian nationalism from different perspectives. But the fact remains that in spite of its narrow social base and limited approach the formation of Indian National Congress marked the journey of new democratic political movement for nationhood.

5.9 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the role of intellectuals in the emergence of Indian nationalism.

2) Can British administrative measures be considered as an important factor in the rise of nationalism in India?

3) Discuss the views of various historians on the phenomenon of nationalism in India.

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UNIT 6 ECONOMIC NATIONALISM*

Structure

6.1 Introduction

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6.4 Summary

6.5 Exercises

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Economic nationalism was a crucial part of Indian nationalism, particularly in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. It was rooted in the comprehensive economic critique of the colonial rule which the early nationalist leaders undertook in their publications, speeches and public campaigns. Their writings and speeches created the framework in which both the unity of India and the foreignness of the British rule could be situated. It was a domain in which both the 'Moderate' and 'Extremist' leadership took part in creating and shaping an adversarial discourse which proved to be enduring.

6.2 WHAT IS ECONOMIC NATIONALISM?

Economic Nationalism, along with economic liberalism and Marxism, is considered among the three most significant ideologies of modern political economy. Economic nationalism has been conventionally understood as the economic ideology which favours domestic control of economy, labour and capital formation. It has been viewed as favouring some sort of autarchy in opposition to globalisation which visualises interdependence among all nations. To attain its goal, the economic nationalists are supposed to impose tariff to restrict free trade, to promote indigenous industries and to seek import substitution.

While such a characterisation is not untrue, recent writings have emphasised that economic nationalism has more to do with nation than with a certain fixed variety of economic policies such as tariff barriers and protectionism. Thus, the ideology of economic nationalism, in this view, should be defined in terms of its nationalist content rather than its endorsement of specific economic policies.

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Moreover, by bringing the nation and nationalism into the idea of economic nationalism, it is possible to see more clearly that the economic nationalists can pursue a variety of economic policies some of which may be associated with other streams of economic thought.

6.2.1 Origin of the Idea of Economic Nationalism

Friedrich List (1789-1846) is considered as the most important economic nationalist of the nineteenth century and also the initiator of the concept of economic nationalism. List's theory of 'national economics' differed from the doctrines of 'individual economics' and 'cosmopolitan economics' by Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832). In his book, *The National System of Political Economy* (1844), List criticised the economic liberals for assessing the economic policies basically for the benefit of the individuals or the entire humanity. He criticised the 'dead materialism' of liberal thought and argued that the liberals considered 'individuals as mere producers and consumers, not as citizens of states or members of nations'. According to List, such 'boundless cosmopolitanism' did not take into account the crucial significance of the nation for the purpose of economic policy. He asserted: 'Between each individual and entire humanity, however, stands THE NATION'. He formulated his perspective based on this intermediate agency: 'I would indicate, as the distinguishing characteristics of my system, NATIONALITY. On the nature of *nationality*, as the intermediate interest between those of *individualism* and of *entire humanity*, my whole structure is based'. Since individuals are members of the nation, the economic policy should not aim exclusively for the wealth-maximisation of the individual, but should be oriented to develop nation's culture and power. Such a development would finally enrich the entire humanity because 'the civilisation of the human race [is] only conceivable and possible by means of the civilisation and development of the individual nations'. Thus, List's aim was to direct the enquiry to 'how a *given nation* can obtain …prosperity, civilisation and power'. The mechanism through which this was to be achieved was by developing the country industrially. Thus, erecting tariff barrier for providing protection to the infant industries became the basic aim of List's economic policy.

Besides this important trend of economic nationalism enunciated by List, there were three other noticeable trends in nineteenth-century Europe:

1) This strand of economic nationalism developed a critique of economic liberals' policy of convertible currency. The economic liberals believed that such a monetary programme would facilitate free trade. Thus, for this purpose they supported the gold standard for all currencies for a common monetary standard. The economic nationalists opposed this and one of their strongest ideologues was Thomas Attwood (1783-1859), a British banker and politician. Attwood proposed that Britain should have a paper currency which was not tied to gold. He also argued that the government should increase money supply at the time of economic depression. He felt that these policies would reduce unemployment. His views on currency was echoed by American economist Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879) who argued for an inconvertible currency which would promote domestic economic growth by allowing the money supply to expand freely. Similarly, Isaac Buchanan (1810-83), a Canadian businessman and politician, also preferred inconvertible national currency because it provide full employment to the

people and develop the productive resources of the country [Helleiner 2002: 316].

2) Yet another strand in nineteenth-century economic nationalism favoured autarchy and a strong interventionist state. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a German philosopher and publicist, strongly favoured national economic self-sufficiency. For this, he advocated an interventionist state which would directly provide the economic needs of the people. In an economic treatise published in 1800, *The Closed Commercial State*, argued in favour of autarchic economic nationalism, and a strong interventionist state which would ensure employment and would regulate wages and prices. He insisted on an inconvertible currency to control the domestic prices and on prohibition of foreign trade as fluctuations in trade might destabilise national economic plans. Another German publicist, literary figure and political economist was Adam Heinrich Muller (1779-1829) who strongly criticised the liberal political economy and the system of free trade. Whereas Fichte's economic ideas were inspired by the Jacobinist policies in revolutionary France, Muller's thoughts were conservative and anti-liberal. Muller's opinion was that free trade was antithetical to national unity. He, therefore, advocated protectionism, inconvertible national paper currency, and an autarchic economy.

3) There was a belief among many economic nationalists that liberal economic policies such as free trade and gold standard for currency were not in conformity with national cohesion. However, such liberal economic policies in case of certain countries, particularly Britain, were quite helpful in attainment of nationalist goals. A lot of British policy-makers were in favour of free trade not because of their internationalism and advocacy of world peace, but because this would have promoted their monopoly of trade in machine-made goods. This would enhance the power and wealth of their own country. The ideology of free trade also provided the British a sense of nationalist superiority with which to denigrate the culture and traditions of other, particularly colonial, countries. But the liberal content in economic policies was not to be found only among the dominant industrial and colonial power like Britain. It was present even in the policies of those countries which developed somewhat late along industrial lines, such as France, Germany, Belgium and Netherlands. Thus, it may be said that economic nationalism was not uniformly against liberal economic policies. Certain, though limited, trends of economic nationalism endorsed some of the liberal policies, depending upon the actual requirements of the respective countries.

Thus, economic nationalism may be understood as concerned not with particular economic policies, but with the nation. The economic nationalists may advocate certain policies which would help the national economic growth at a particular point of time. There are no fixed economic policies advocated by economic nationalism. It may adopt a variety of forms and contents depending on the situation. It is a form of nationalism rather than of economic theory. It is not against economic liberalism as such. In certain situations, it may advocate similar policies as economic liberalism. The conventional view of the political economists identifying economic nationalism with mercantilism, statism and protectionism is no longer valid. It is not the state but the nation, and it is not specific economic policies but

economic interests of the nation at any given time, that economic nationalism is concerned with.

6.2.2 Economic Nationalism in Colonial Context

Although he believed that a peaceful world order could only be established on the basis of equality among nations, Friedrich List's notion of equality was limited to the Western nations. For other countries, which he called the 'torrid zone' of the world such as the Asian and African countries, he believed that the idea of infant-industry protection was irrelevant because such countries were destined to be colonised (Helleiner 2002: 314). Such a view was quite in keeping with the policies of economic liberals in Britain and other countries that there should be an international division of labour which would allow the Western nations to produce manufactured goods while the rest of the world would trade in its primary products.

Economic nationalism in the colonies can be situated within the broader framework of an unequal relationship between the imperialist country and the colonial country, between the centre and the periphery. This relationship was based on unilateral transfer of funds from the colony to the colonising country. This transfer of resources can be direct and indirect. The direct forms consist of repatriation of income through plunder (particularly in the early phase), salaries and interests on investment. The indirect forms can be several, the most important being the unfavourable terms of trade for the colony under which the colony is encouraged to produce primary and low-priced goods which it exports either to the colonising country or to some other country in order to earn foreign exchange for the benefit of repatriation of money. The colony is also forced to import manufactured goods from the colonising country. It was in this context of unequal economic relationship that the ideas of economic nationalism developed in the colonial countries. Here we are going to discuss these ideas in case of India, which was a colonial country from 1757 to 1857.

6.3 ECONOMIC NATIONALISM IN INDIA

Economic nationalism in India developed within the context of its subordination to Britain. This was associated with two other developments – capitalist expansion on a world scale leading to what has also been called as 'the first globalization', and colonial construction of India in terms of a territorially defined space. Britain had industrialised by the middle of the nineteenth century, pushing out in all directions in search for raw materials for its industries, food grains for its working population and relatively secure markets for its manufactured goods. Some other European countries had also started industrialising in the nineteenth century blocking Britain's penetration in their territories as well as posing as competitors in non-industrialised countries of Europe and the rest of the world. Thus, the European industrialisation was opening up the globe in unprecedented and unforeseen ways, leading to tremendous rise in international trade which was basically unequal in nature consisting of flow of manufactured commodities out of Europe and primary products into Europe, particularly its Northern and Western parts. The drive to secure this unequal trade led to intense rivalry among the European powers in the late nineteenth century resulting in what has been called as the 'partition of the world' into respective areas of influences either as directly-controlled territories or areas of indirect influence.

On the other hand, there were ever increasing attempts on the part of the imperialist European powers to remove the internal barriers of trade within particular colonial territories and administrative unification of a defined territorial space. In India, after 1858, the colonial state was consolidated and its institutional structure was expanded on an unprecedented scale. It was also simultaneously engaged in effecting a 'distinctively modern forms of social, economic, and territorial closure'. This comprised of eliminating the internal custom barriers, introduction of a uniform system of laws, a centralised monetary system, building of a network of transport and communication such as railways, roads, post and telegraph, telephones, institution of decennial censuses for enumeration of people, various survey agencies for the measurement of land and people, and a modern bureaucracy and police for administering the land revenue, maintaining law and order and generally making the presence of the state visible all over the country.

The territorialisation of space was intimately linked with the deterritorialised character of the global-imperial economy. Thus, 'the colonial production of space entailed practices that both bound indigenous society within a territorialised particularity and universalised social relations'. In this way, 'the bounded economic and territorial whole of colonial India was inserted within the deterritorialising dynamic of the world market' (Goswami 1998: 612-13). It was within this context of restricted colonial space, wider global market and international division of labour that the nationalist response was formulated and popularised.

6.3.1 Early Thoughts

The main stream of nationalist economic thoughts was formulated in the period between 1870s and 1905. However, there was a small group of people in Maharashtra who even earlier discussed and wrote on some of issues concerned with the economic exploitation of India by the British. In fact, cognition of the negative economic consequences of British colonial rule in India can be traced back to the early years of 1830s in the writings of Raja Rammohan Roy. He complained against the 'tribute' paid to Britain and showed his concern for the plight of the self-cultivating peasants. But in the 1840s, certain Maharashtrian intellectuals such as Bhaskar Pandurang Tarkhadkar, Govind Vitthal Kunte (popularly known as Bhau Mahajan) and Ramkrishna Vishwanath criticised the British rule for economically exploiting India, particularly by draining its resources. They were convinced that instead of being good for India, the British colonial rule was 'the most bitter curse India has ever been visited with'. Although they also critiqued British rule on political and social grounds, their severest critique was on the economic front. Bhaskar Tarkhadkar declared that he wanted 'to show how rigorous the present policy of the British has been in operation in regards to draining India of its wealth and reducing it to poverty'. He argued that the destruction of the indigenous industry in Maharashtra, as in India as a whole, resulted in poverty and misery of the artisans. Moreover, the siphoning of India's wealth between the battle of Plassey in 1757 and 1815 amounted to 'about 1,000 million pounds'. He also criticised the no-tariff policy of the colonial government whereby 'British goods were forced upon [India] without paying any duty'. This resulted in limiting the possibility of the growth of modern industry in India, besides destroying the indigenous handicrafts industry. Similarly, Bhau Mahajan criticised the imperialist policies of waging wars and charging them on Indian treasury: 'Having emptied the Indian treasury on ill-conceived wars, the

government issued bonds….' Ramkrishna Viswanath attributed India's poverty mainly to drain of wealth and the adverse balance of trade. He further advocated Indians to work hard and invest in national modern industry (Naik 2001). Thus, since the 1840s, the Indian intelligentsia was agitated on the issue of the unfair and exploitative treatment of the Indians by the colonial rulers. Their criticism, though sketchy, covered several aspects of this economic discrimination which was later taken up much more comprehensively.

6.3.2 Economic Critique of Colonial Rule

During the 1870s and the 1880s, a wide-ranging and comprehensive nationalist critique of British rule emerged in India. The most important proponents of the emerging 'political economy of nationhood' were Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), G. Subramaniya Iyer (1855-1916), G.V. Joshi (1851-1911), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925). They realised that India was being integrated within global capitalism in a subordinate position. Ranade defined this position as 'dependent colonial economy'. According to him, the country was being transformed into a 'plantation, growing raw produce to be shipped by British Agents in British ships, to be worked into Fabrics by British skill and capital, and to be re-exported to the Dependency by British merchants to their corresponding British firms' [cited in Goswami, 615]. These nationalist writers also criticised the processes of 'ruralization' and 'de-industrialization' to which India was subjected. Moreover, the theory of 'drain of wealth' as formulated by Naoroji remained the most popular nationalist economic plank to denounce the British rule.

In his pioneering and magisterial survey of the economic thoughts of the early Indian nationalists, Bipan Chandra discusses in detail the scathing critique of colonial economic policies by the early nationalist leaders. He covers various points of nationalist critique on economic drain, decline of indigenous industry, excessive taxation, discriminatory international trade, etc. In this section, we will briefly discuss some important issues related to this far-ranging critique.

6.3.2.1 The Drain of Wealth

The critique of the drain of wealth from India became probably the most popular sentiment in the anti-colonial nationalist narrative. That the colonial rulers were taking out India's money leading to country's impoverishment was conceived as the biggest economic evil of the colonial regime. Drain was conceived as unilateral transfer of resources from India to Britain without any corresponding economic and commercial gain. The venerated nationalist, Dadabhai Naoroji, was the originator of the 'drain theory'. In 1867, in a speech, he argued that Britain was siphoning off India's wealth which amounted to about 25 per cent of country's revenue which was 'added to the resources of England'. In 1873, he further criticised Britain for 'ignoring India's interests, and making it the drudge for the benefit of England'. This, he stated, was unnatural and a monstrous evil. He declared that 'to stop the bleeding drain from India' was 'the most important question of the day' and exhorted his countrymen to summon all their energies to solve this problem. For about fifty years he carried on his struggle against drain. His book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901) remains a significant milestone in the formulation of the nationalist political economy. The book by

William Digby (1849-1904), *Prosperous British India* (1901), G.S. Iyer's *Some Economic Aspects of British Rule in India* (1903) and R.C. Dutt's *Economic History of India* (1901-03) were other detailed works bitterly critical of the imperialist drain of India's resources. Several other leaders and newspapers joined this campaign which soon became the central tenet of mass nationalist ideology.

6.3.2.2 Poverty of Indian People

The grinding poverty of the great mass of Indian people, after more than a century of colonial rule, was visible to all. The earlier hope harboured by Indian intelligentsia that the British rule in India would follow benevolent economic policies leading to prosperity had vanished by the late nineteenth century. Since the 1870s, there had been constant concern about extreme poverty of Indians among the nationalists. The subject of poverty dominated most public discussions on India by the nationalists. The relentless criticism of British rule for impoverishing India was quite evident in the writings and speeches of even the 'Moderate' nationalists. In 1870, Naoroji read his famous paper on this issue and in 1876 came out his book, *The Poverty of India*. M.G. Ranade, G.V. Joshi, R.C. Dutt, and others regularly discussed this topic on every available forum. The Indian National Congress took up the issue in 1886 and discussed it regularly since then. In 1891, it passed a resolution stating that 'full fifty millions of the population, a number yearly increasing, are dragging out a miserable existence on the verge of starvation, and that, in every decade, several millions actually perish by starvation' [Chandra 1966: 9]. Discussions and resolutions on this issue became a regular feature in subsequent sessions. The Indian nationalist intellectuals argued that India was one of poorest countries in the world despite more than a century of British rule. What was even worse, they asserted, was that this poverty was growing. They tried to rally all classes and groups in India on this platform. Thus, the problem of poverty was made a common national issue and a plank for unity of all classes in Indian society.

Debate on the 'poverty problem' was raised to such a pitch by the nationalists and their sympathisers that the British officials were forced to respond to them. They initially denied the existence of poverty and instead tried to paint a rosy picture of colonial rule. But the figures given by the nationalists, quoting mostly from the official sources, required something more than flat denial. Several government officials took it upon themselves to provide official apologia by arguing that this was not the case, and India was actually progressing. However, their arguments did not appear convincing to the people.

Directly and indirectly, the Indian leaders pointed out that the real cause of poverty was alien and exploitative character of the colonial regime, and the functioning of the colonial government was oriented towards serving the interests of Britain rather than that of India.

6.3.2.3 Underdevelopment of Industry

The nationalists were of the firm opinion that India was going through a process of industrial underdevelopment under the colonial rule. It was caused by two phenomena, both closely related to colonial policies – decline of India's indigenous industries and the failure to quickly develop the modern industry. This, according to the nationalists, played a big role in the poverty of the Indian people as the jobs in one sector was lost but not compensated by the rapid growth

of the modern sector. They constantly pointed out the fact that India was once a great manufacturing country which exported its goods to all parts of Asia and Europe. Now the situation has reversed and the Indians themselves were forced to import clothes from Britain. This was 'one of the saddest chapters in the history of British India', as R.C. Dutt declared. Due to this India's wealth was declining, employment opportunities were drastically diminishing, and poverty was steadily increasing. The shrinking of industrial employment had led to growing ruralisation and intense pressure on agriculture which itself was in a precarious situation. This meant, in Ranade's words, 'that we are standing on the edge of a precipice, and the slightest push down will drive us into the abyss below of unmixed and absolute helplessness' [Chandra 1966: 57].

This was done because the British used their political power to sell their cheaper machine-made goods in India leading to destruction of the famous Indian handicrafts industry. The abolition of tariffs thereby imposing free trade on India and the construction of railways for cheap and rapid access to the remote Indian markets created conditions for easy spread of British industrial dominance over Indian markets. Various other policies of the colonial government thereafter resulted in very slow development of the modern industries. For example, the nationalists argued, the abolition of tariff doubly hindered the growth – by allowing cheap foreign goods to invade the country's markets and by decreasing the revenue collection of the government which would then be compensated either by more internal extraction or low public expenditure. One of the nationalist leaders, Surendranath Banerjea stated: 'It had been the settled policy of England in India ever since her rise in political power, to convert India into a land of raw produce for the benefit of the manufacturers and operatives of England' [Chandra 1966: 55]. The nationalists, therefore, demanded that such policies which obstructed the growth of Indian industries should be removed and emphasis should be laid on speedy industrialisation of the country. In this respect, the most important issue on their agenda was the creation of a suitable tariff regime which would help the growth of Indian industries by restricting the entry of cheaper machine-made goods from more industrialised countries.

6.3.2.4 Public Finance

Nationalist criticism of the colonial public finance related to both its aspects – how much revenue was collected, and how it was spent. The financial policies of the colonial government received great attention from the nationalists because of it deleterious effect on the resources of the country. They were very critical of the taxation policies of the colonial government which claimed that the taxes in India were quite light. It was argued by the government officials that the revenues from land, toddy and opium were not taxes thus making the tax regime appear light. The nationalists, on the other hand, argued that all collections by the government from the total annual income of the country should be considered as forms of tax. They rejected the government claims that India was lightly taxed, and contended that the tax burden was huge and was reaching its limits. Ranade stated in 1880 that any 'further increase of taxation must be adjured as political insanity'. Similarly Naoroji bitterly remarked that the colonial rulers were 'screwing out more and more taxes, like squeezing a squeezed orange – inflicting suffering and distress'. The *Kesari*, a Marathi journal edited by Tilak, wrote:

'No article in India has escaped taxation. Even the foliage of trees has been taxed. There are, however, some things which are yet to be taxed, so that the triumph of the English may be complete. Among such things may be mentioned the skin of the Indian people and their atmosphere'. [Quoted in Chandra 1966: 503-4].

The nationalist argument was that it was not the amount of taxation per head which should be considered, but its proportion to the per capita income. Calculated by taking the amount of collection as a proportion of the income of each individual, Naoroji argued, the taxes in India were 16 per cent while in England it was only 8 per cent. Thus, the nationalists contended, the burden of taxation should be seen in relation to the wealth of the country and the earnings of the people.

Even more important than the amount of taxes, from the nationalist point of view, was the manner of its expenditure. A large part of this tax collection was taken out of the country and not spent inside. As Naoroji argued, 'It is not the incidence of taxation that is India's evil…. The evil is the drain of a portion of the revenue out of the country'. Moreover, its use on military, on wars with India's neighbours, on railways and on various unproductive and wasteful activities was severely criticised by them. G. K. Gokhale argued in 1897 that utility of taxation in any country was decided by 'the purposes for which the increase has been incurred and the results produced by such outlay of public money'. In the European countries and independent nations, the high level of taxation had resulted in 'increased strength and security to the nations, and increased enlightenment and prosperity to the people'. But in India, Gokhale asserted, constantly increasing taxation and its irrational expenditure 'under autocratic management, defective constitutional control, and the inherent defects of alien domination, only helped to bring about a constantly increasing exploitation of our resources, has retarded our material progress, weakened our natural defences, and burdened us with undefined and indefinite financial liabilities'. [Bipan Chnadra 1966: 575].

The fundamental point which the nationalists wanted to make was that it was alien rule which was basically responsible for this miserable state of affairs. If the government of an independent country levies more taxes, it was for the benefit of the people; but higher collection by an alien government results in depleting the national resources.

6.3.2.5 Agriculture

Almost 80 per cent population of colonial India was dependent on agriculture, and revenue from land formed the largest part of government collection in the nineteenth century. The land revenue demand was high and it was strictly collected resulting in growing impoverishment of the peasantry. The nationalists picked up this issue early and insisted that it was one of main causes of recurrent famines, India's poverty and decline of its agriculture. Almost all nationalists took up this issue, but it was R.C. Dutt who developed it into a consistent campaign. The Indian National Congress passed resolutions on this issue almost every year from 1888 to 1903. Critique of colonial land revenue policy emanated from almost the entire nationalist leadership. The nationalist agitators objected to: i) the high pitch of land revenue which took a large portion of agricultural savings, draining capital away from India, hindering investment in agriculture, pauperising the

countryside and creating regular famines; ii) constant revisions in assessment of revenue creating uncertainty and dissuading the cultivators to invest in land, leading to stagnation and decay in agriculture; iii) periodic raise in revenue demands by the government encouraged the landlords also to raise it even more in their areas; iv) strict collection of rents and revenues from the peasants accompanied by evictions and punishment. The combined effect of these policies was to drain capital out of agriculture, to prevent investment in land, decline in the quality of land, pauperisation of agricultural population and the recurrence of famines resulting in large-scale deaths.

To improve the matters, the nationalists suggested that the government should decrease its land revenue demand so that the peasants be left with some surplus to tide over the adverse weather conditions, the mode of collection be made more flexible and a permanent tenure should be fixed in all regions.

The demand of a 'permanent settlement' did not necessarily mean that the nationalists were asking for a Bengal-type Zamindari Settlement all over. In many cases, what they were demanding was a long-term fixation of tenure under which the peasants would be assured that they had to pay a certain revenue for a long time and that their lands would not be confiscated. The fact that most of the nationalists distinguished between the Bengal-type settlement and a fixed government demand under all types of settlement was attested in their numerous writings. [For details, see Chandra 1966: 420-36]. Their appeal to the government was to fix the revenue for a long time so that the peasants might benefit and the surplus would be re-invested for the improvement of land.

6.3.2.6 Foreign Trade

Although India had always been participating in international trade, the colonial takeover resulted in an enormous increase. Both import and export expanded exponentially and the nature of trade underwent a significant transformation. Until 1813, India had been primarily an exporter of manufactured goods, particularly cotton and silk textiles, and an importer of precious metals such as gold and silver. However, in the nineteenth century, it became an exporter of primary products such as raw cotton, jute, other industrial raw materials, tea, coffee, and foodgrains, and an importer of manufactured goods. Another feature of India's trade became an excess in the value of exports over the value of imports.

Here also the nationalists contested the optimistic view of the colonial administration that the growth of trade was good for India. They argued that the volume of trade in itself could not be taken as an indicator of the prosperity of a country without taking into account its context and its nature. They also did not agree that the trade volume was large if compared to the European countries. So far as the nature of the trade was concerned, they averred, it was a reversal of the earlier trend and reflected the de-industrialised status of Indian economy. They also recognised that the so-called favourable balance of trade consisting of excess of export over imports was not in India's benefit. It was rather a tailor-made condition for earning foreign exchange so that India could pay growing interest on its forced foreign debts, the so-called 'Home Charges' be paid, and the salaries and other earnings of the British in India be remitted in British currency. Thus, the trade earnings of India benefited Britain and drained India. Dadabhai Naoroji in 1895 declared that the export earning was 'mostly only the form in which the

increasing crushing tribute and the trade-profits and wants of foreigners are provided by the poor people of British India'. R.C. Dutt also pointed out that 'the Economic Drain from India for Home Charges compelled that country to export more than she could import'. This excess was forced and maintained even during the years of famine when the country itself needed foodgrains.

6.3.3 Emergence of Economic Nationalism in Colonial India

Economic Nationalism emerged in India out of the ideological contestation between the colonial government officials and the early nationalists. The late nineteenth century was the period when this ideological struggle was the most intense. The earlier optimism that world's leading industrial power would develop India in its own image gave way to despairing realisation that India was in fact regressing. After comprehensive and repeated analysis of each aspect of Indian economy, the early nationalists seemed to be reaching the conclusion that stagnation and decline of Indian economy was not due to oversight by the colonial masters but was integrally connected with the structure of colonial rule, that the 'British rule was economically injurious to India and perhaps it was designedly so' [Chandra 1966: 737].

The critique of the classical political economy and of the narrow economic policies of colonial regime provided the ground to develop the concept of a 'dependent colonial economy' along with the universalistic principles of nationalism. Ranade, in his writings of economics during the 1890s, criticised classical economics for being too individualistic and particularistic. He argued that it was developed in the specific context of Britain and was not universally applicable. He criticised the English economists for proposing laissez faire purely from an economic point of view without looking at the broader issue. The broader context consisted in taking into account 'the political and social elements'. And 'if political economy is to be anything more than schoolmen's metaphysics', it has to consider 'the higher interests and aspirations' of the people. The individualism and economism of the classical economics can be tamed only by subordinating it to the higher principle of the national and general interest:

'Individual interests are not the center round which the Theory should revolve ... the true center is the Body Politic of which that Individual is a member, and that Collective Defense and Well-Being, Social Education and Discipline ... must be the center, if the Theory is not to be merely Utopian'. [Quoted in Goswami 1998: 619].

What the nationalists desired was the development of a proper national economic policy which would serve Indian interests. They wished to propel India on to the path of modern industrial development. Overall, their economic outlook was bourgeois in character. But they did also speak for the masses of the peasants and workers. Their greatest achievement was to make 'the people of India conscious of the bond of common economic interests and of the existence of a common enemy and thus helped to weld them in a common nationalism' [Chandra 1966: 758].

6.4 SUMMARY

Economic Nationalism developed in India during the last three decades of the late nineteenth and the first two decades of the early twentieth centuries. Even

though we witness stirrings of such sentiments in the earlier period also, particularly in the 1840s, it was only in the late nineteenth century that it fully evolved. It was based on the realisation that the British rule was inimical to the economic interests of India because the economic policies of the colonial government were geared towards the benefits of the metropolitan country, that is, Britain. The early nationalists argued that India needed its independent national economic policies which would herald it on the path of modern industrial development. Through all means available at their disposal – newspapers, journals, speeches, books, lectures and political agitations – they constantly campaigned on this issue for almost five decades. Such concerted criticism of the colonial regime gave rise to an almost unified body of opinions on economic issues among the nationalist intelligentsia. The result was an unprecedented realisation among Indian people, particularly the middle classes, that India was a territorial unity and that its interests were common. As this realisation grew over the years, the foundations of Indian nationalism were firmly laid.

6.5 EXERCISES

1) What is economic nationalism? Discuss the views of its earliest proponents.

2) Who were the important economic nationalist thinkers in India? What did they think about colonialism?

3) Discuss the views of early nationalists in India on drain of wealth and lack of industries in India.

UNIT 7 RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM IN INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL SPHERES*

Structure

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Colonial Mimicry or a New Cultural Synthesis

7.3 Cosmopolitanism of Indigenous Intellectuals as Resistance

7.4 Rationalism and Religious Universalism

7.5 Cultural-Ideological Resistance and Incipient Nationalism

7.6 Limits of Cultural-Ideological Battle in a Colonial Milieu

7.7 Summary

7.8 Exercises

7.1 INTRODUCTION

There were many factors which were responsible for the colonial conquest. Some of these immediate reasons were advanced technology of weapons and maritime transportation, the failure of non-Europeans to cope with the infectious diseases brought by the colonisers to which the colonial people had not developed immunity, the strong centralised polities of Europe based on emerging identities of nationhood. We also know that colonisation of lands through conquest and consequent domination of colonised people also led to dissemination of colonial culture and ideology. The responses to this spread of colonial cultural ideas were varied. One with which we are quite familiar was the intellectual introspection about the strengths and weaknesses of indigenous culture, religion and institutions. The Indian intellectuals analysed colonialism in the context of their own society. The response had been mixed and varied. Bhikhu Parekh classifies this response under categories like traditionalists, modernists, critical traditionalists and critical modernists. While the traditionalists upheld their cultural pasts and its traditions, all others were in one way or the other trying to find new alternatives to the existing social structures. The modernists believed that the emancipation of India lay in the radically restructuring traditions and adopting western mode of thinking and technology or in other words they tried to create India as a mirror image of the imperial power. The critical traditionalists relied on indigenous cultural resources but did not mind some additional, supplementary borrowings from the resurgent west. The critical modernist also stood for a synthesis of two cultures, the indigenous and the western, but gave more weight to 'advanced' rational thinking of the Europeans. In this Unit, we will try to highlight some of ways and means through which Indian intellectuals offered resistance to colonialism in the sphere of culture and ideology.

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7.2 COLONIAL MIMICRY OR A NEW CULTURAL SYNTHESIS

The relationship between ideological and cultural impact of the West on the indigenous society or what now scholars calls as 'colonial modernity' and the 'Indian renaissance' has been discussed and debated by the historians of modern India. Some believe in a kind of stimulus-response assumption and feel that an inert and degraded Indian society was modernised by the impact of Western knowledge. In other words, they argue that English education and literature, administrative practices, science and philosophy and material and technological elements of the Western civilisation acted like a stimulating force to wake up Indians from their long slumber and brought them closer to the social conditions, processes, and discourses that had emerged with Age of Enlightenment in Europe. There are others who contradict this line of argument and believe that Western ideas and administrative practices could not make much of a difference in superstitious and backward looking traditional Indian society. Whatever change took place as a result of Western impact was superficial, partial and open to doubt. Another viewpoint is that Western ideology and cultural practices, in whatever distorted and mimic form they entered Indian milieu, were instruments of colonisation of Indian society and it was through them that Indians acquired a sham and apparent modernity.

The encounter between the English ideas and institutions and indigenous Indian society and culture was, however, more complex than these interpretations. If we accept the broad description of modernity from Anthony Giddens as a shorthand term for modern society, or industrial civilisation associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation, by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Largely as a result of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society—more technically, a complex of institutions, which, unlike any preceding culture, lives in the future, rather than the past, then naturally Indian response to it was varied. In general connotation, 'mimicry' refers to the imitation of one species by another. Webster's New World College Dictionary further defines the term as "close resemblance, in colour, form, or behaviour of one organism to another or to some object in its environment … it serves to disguise or conceal the organism from predators." The disguising of the organism in the process of mimicry brings the term closer to the warfare device of camouflaging which, according to Webster's Dictionary, implies "the disguising of troops, ships, guns, etc. to conceal them from the enemy, as by the use of paint, nets, or leaves in patterns merging with the background."

Homi K. Bhabha, a famous critic has used the concept of mimicry to describe and explain this cultural encounter between the colonial rulers and their colonial subjects. The effect of mimicry is camouflage. It is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare. He sees the coloniser as a snake in the grass who, speaks in "a tongue that is forked," and produces a mimetic representation that "... emerges as one of the most elusive

and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge". For Homi K. Bhabha, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable 'Other', as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite". He is the foremost contemporary critic who has tried to unveil the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse in order to highlight the colonizer's ambivalence with respect to his attitude towards the colonised Other and vice versa. It is precisely mimicry that disrupts the colonial discourse by double vision, double articulation or the forked tongue. The colonial mimicry, argues Bhabha, was a strategic project to create a class of 'domesticated others', representatives of colonized subjects who would assist the colonial project by acting as intermediaries between the colonial presence and the colonised people. But the discourse of colonial imitation is structured around an ambivalence that accentuates the difference between the anglicised men doing the imitation and the British colonial rulers. According to him, mimicry or imitation always produces a slippage between that which it meant to represent and the representation itself and this itself is a threat to the civilizing mission of the colonial rulers. Because the figure of mimicry do not represent, but only repeats, it accounts for the partial presence of the colonial subject, through its ambivalent discourse. However, it is a questionable assumption to reduce critical investments of various intellectual strands to such simple notion of colonial mimicry. The Indian intellectuals analysed colonialism in the context of their own society. The response had been mixed and varied. The urge to change emerged not only in secular and cultural field but also in religious realm and literary-artistic forms. The urge for change came from within, that is, it has indigenous roots and modernity came not simply as the distorted and feeble caricature of the Western model. India had precedents in past of such cultural encounters with outside and it had assimilated intellectual and cultural trends from outside even in earlier phases of its history. The English colonial scholars and administrators had attributed an essential, ancient and immutable characteristic to the historicity of India. Fundamental to this belief was that of an unchanging Hinduism, unless it was threatened by events external to itself. The Indian intellectuals focused on the dynamic side of Indian history and culture. It was a kind of absorption of new elements in the enduring and ever-changing civilisation of India by selection of some aspects of past and borrowing some novel features from the newly encountered Western knowledge and culture. All this was done not just for imitation, but in a spirit of critical self-enquiry. As M.G. Ranade put it beautifully: "No mere foreign graftings can ever thrive and flourish unless the tender plant on which the grafting is to be made first germinates and sends its roots deep into its own indigenous soil. When the living tree is thus nourished and watered, the foreign manure may add flavour and beauty to it."

The colonised Indians did not always try to correct or extend the Orientalists who suggested an essential, ancient and immutable characteristic to the historicity of India. They in their own diffused way, tried to create an alternative language of discourse. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), though deeply impressed by Western rationalist thought and though himself an agnostic, lived like an orthodox *pandit* and formulated his dissent in indigenous terms. He did not counterpoise John Locke or David Hume against *Manusamhita;* he counterpoised the *Parasara Sutra.* Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar did seek to create a new political awareness which would combine a critical awareness of Hinduism and colonialism with cultural and individual authenticity. Ishwar Chandra too fought institutionalised violence against Indian women, giving primacy to social reform

over politics. But his diagnosis of Hinduism did not grow out of feelings of cultural inferiority; it grew out of perceived contradictions within Hinduism itself. Even when he fought for Indian women, he did not operate on the basis of Westernised ideals of masculinity and femininity or on the basis of a theory of cultural progress. He refused to Christianise Hinduism. He refused to use the imagery of a golden age of the Hindus from which contemporary Hindus had allegedly fallen, he resisted reading Hinduism as a 'proper religion' in the Western sense, he rejected the ideologies of masculinity and adulthood, and he refused to settle scores with the West by creating a nation of super-Hindus or by defending Hinduism as a perfect antidote to Western cultural encroachment. His was an effort to protect not the formal structure of Hinduism but its spirit, as an open, anarchic federation of sub-cultures and textual authorities which allowed new readings and internal criticisms. Thus, Ishwar Chandra's resistance to colonialism was not defined by the Western version of rationalism, the popular Bengali *bhadralok* stereotypes about him notwithstanding. It was also not heavily reactive, though that impression too was created by some elements of his everyday life including his Indian dress, interpersonal style and food habits.

The colonial rulers thought that colonial exploitation was an incidental and deplorable upshot of a philosophy of life that was in harmony with superior forms of political and economic organisation. They could not effectively rule a continent-sized country while believing themselves to be moral cripples. They, thus, projected their cultural forms and ideas as superior. The imperialists claimed that their policy was a noble enterprise and its aim was to civilise and benefit the colonial people. A belief in the virtues of empire was widespread at the time; there were also many dissenters among the indigenous intellectuals. Some of them tried to discover an alternative frame of reference within which the oppressed do not seem weak, degraded and distorted men. Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) borrowed their fundamental values from the Western world view and, in spite of their image as orthodox revivalists, were mercilessly critical of the contemporary Hinduism. They also took the position that the Hindus had been great, virile and mature in ancient times and had fallen on bad days because of their loss of contact with textual Brahminism and true Ksatriyahood. Thus, Vivekananda and Dayanand, too, tried to Christianise Hinduism, particularly the dominant Hindu concept of the desirable person. In doing so, they identified the West with power and hegemony, which in turn they identified with a superior civilisation. Then they tried to 'list' the differences between the West and India and attributed the former's superiority to these differences. The rest of their lives they spent exhorting the wretched Hindus to pursue these cultural differentiae of the West. And as expected they found out that traditions supporting some of the valued Western traits were there in Hinduism but were lost on the 'unworthy' contemporary Hindus. The main elements of their 'reformed' Hinduism were: i) an attempt to turn Hinduism into an organised religion with an organised priesthood, church and missionaries; ii) acceptance of the idea of proselytisation *(suddhi*); iii) an attempt to introduce the concept of the sacred book following the Semitic creeds (the Vedas and the Gita in the case of the two Swamis); and iv) acceptance of ideas akin to monotheism and a certain puritanism and this-worldly asceticism borrowed partly from the Catholic church and partly from Calvinism. These intellectual debts to the West were indirect because the intellectuals of this type tried to seek the support of scriptures for the social and religious reforms that they were advocating. They cited and often re-

interpreted the scriptures to justify the need for reform. The wisdom of *shastras* was used by them according to necessity and desirability felt for furthering the cause of reform. They justified deviations from the scriptures by re-interpreting them according to contemporary times and principle of rationalism.

Partha Chaterjee, in his conceptual fortification of the 'domestic space', depicts home as the 'spiritual-moral domain', as a space unconquered by colonial intrusion and its expanding 'public space'. In this 'private space' of home, 'indigenous communities' retained their sovereignty over its primary denizens, women. We feel that such a static picture of family life and its forms neglects the central role of family in local power structures, which got drastically altered by forces unleashed by direct and indirect interventions of colonial power. In fact, we now know that the 'private-ness' of family became a concern of public discourse from the nineteenth century itself. The interior of family did not remain inert, static or immutable. It may be true that the text-based view of Indian family as a unit of patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence played important role in reproducing caste-hierarchy and patriarchal domination but there were also the regional and caste variations in the form of family. Women are not a unified, timeless or ineluctable other as the gender hierarchy is locally variable, mediated by other entities. The domain of home or its boundaries are drawn for it by the larger culture, as well as by the political economies of race, nation, sexuality and empires that shape it. The oriental home was depicted as a pathological, dark, unhygienic space by the British and hence an indication of indigenous communities' incapacity to self-govern themselves. Indians also started themselves refracted about their homes, families and women and the reformers and intellectuals invested a large amount of energy in dealing with women question.

7.3 COSMOPOLITANISM OF INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUALS AS RESISTANCE

Cosmopolitanism is frequently conflated with the imperial inclinations of a historical period; a fact that stresses its contradictory relationships with power. Marx had hinted the emergence of such a cosmopolitanism, the need for a constantly changing market chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. In his words: "It must settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere ... the bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market give a *cosmopolitan* character to production and consumption in every country... The individual creations of individual nations become *common* property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible." Where the world consisted of antagonistic nation-states, the 'other' was often seen as something to fear, to attack, to colonise, to dominate or to keep at bay. The other was dangerous, especially those others who were on the move, such as armies, migrants, traders, vagrants, travellers who might travel into and stay within one's country. The intellectuals are often the people who are on the move at mental level, catching up ideas from different sources and assimilating them and spreading them in a new context with entirely new outcomes. The main tradition in modern cosmopolitan thought sought to extend republican political philosophy into a wider and essentially legal framework beyond the relatively limited modern republic. With this came the vision of a world political community extending beyond the community into which one is born or lives.

Cosmopolitanism thus became linked with the universalism of modern western thought and with political designs aimed at world governance. Cosmopolitanism thus reflected the revolt of the individual against the social world, for to be a 'citizen of the world' was to reject the immediately given and closed world of particularistic attachments. Not surprisingly it became associated with the revolt of the elites against the low culture of the masses. The social world as territorially given, closed and bounded by the nation-state and the class structure of the industrial societies did not sit comfortably with the openness of the cosmopolitan idea, with its universalistic orientation. Rather than seeing cosmopolitanism as a particular or singular condition that either exists or does not, a state or goal to be realised, it should instead be seen as a cultural medium of societal transformation that is based on the principle of world openness, which is associated with the notion of global publics. The dominant conception of cosmopolitanism can be termed moral cosmopolitanism due to the strong emphasis in it on the universalism of the cosmopolitan ethic. In the most well known version of this the basis of cosmopolitanism is the individual whose loyalty is to the universal human community. The ideas of cosmopolitanism came indirectly through the educational medium and the Indian intellectual adopted the stance of universal rationalism and humanism to judge existing indigenous and imported Western ideas through these ideological prisms. In both Eastern and Western India, using the traditional as well as new Western ideas, the Indian intellectuals re-assessed the societal needs and articulated the need for social change and reform of religious traditions. We all know about Raja Rammohan Roy's contribution. His renowned stance against Sati did cite references from the scriptures but his belief was grounded on universal rational principles and morality. This anxiety for use of rational reflection informed by universal ideals was evident in not only in Rammohan's other pronouncements on religious and socio-cultural issues but even in persons like Dayanand Saraswati who advocated a return to original scriptures and believed in infallibility of Vedas but reinterpreted them in the light of modern day rational and utilitarian parameters. Rammohan supported western instead of oriental education because that embraced 'mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy with other useful sciences'. Although religious reform was the main plank of many intellectuals, none of them were entirely religious in nature. Some of them were in fact agnostics like Akshay Kumar Dutt and Vidyasagar, who avoided debate on supernatural questions. Henry Louis Vivien Derozio promoted an aggressive kind of rationalism at Hindu College in Calcutta as a result of which the young western educated students of the college questioned not merely the superstitions of any one particular religion but also the irrationality inherent is belief-system itself and they particularly advocated rationalism. Akshay Kumar Dutt wrote several instructive works and a number of articles in *Tatva Bodhini Patrika* as its editor where he tried to use rational principles to understand nature and it's working. He also examined Indian religions sociologically using Comte's positivism and Utilitarian logic. Here, we should bear in mind that reasoned arguments were not alien to Indian philosophy of Vedanta. In fact logic was integral part of Indian philosophy. But now the intellectuals like Akshay Kumar Dutt learned the method of reason based on observation and experiment to understand the working of all natural phenomena and sought to apply it. This new scientific and empirical method gave a new leverage to the arguments of reformers and intellectuals who were trying to understand the reason for Europe's progress and the 'backwardness' of their own society.

7.4 RATIONALISM AND RELIGIOUS UNIVERSALISM

Two important criteria which guided the course of reform movement in nineteenth century India were rationalism and religious universalism. Social bearing of an institution was judged by a rationalist assessment. Mostly reformists rejected unusual supernatural explanations. Raja Rammohan Roy and Akshay Kumar Dutt both linked natural phenomenon to natural causes. They judged natural and social phenomenon by the one and only principle whether its soundness could be proved. Akshay Kumar Dutt argued that all phenomena should be understood as entirely mechanical processes. This mind-set not only enabled them to adopt a rational approach to tradition but also to appraise the existing socio-religious practices from the point of view of social usefulness. The influential leaders of Brahmo Samaj repudiated the permanent efficacy of Vedas and leaders of Aligarh movement tried to patch up teachings of Quran with the requirements of modern times. The reformers were not always concerned about quoting from religious scriptures for the reforms they were advocating. They often advanced secular perspective for gaining support for their efforts. Akshay Kumar Dutt did not bother to go by past precedents or religious sanctions in advocating widow-remarriage and opposing polygamy and child-marriage. Reformers cited medical reasons to shore up their viewpoint. In Western India, reformers relied less on scriptures as an aid to social reform. For example, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as Lokhitwadi, did not care whether the reform had a sanction in religious scriptures or not. He believed that religion itself should be changed to suit contemporary reality. Reacting sharply against opponents of widow-remarriage, he wrote: 'Enforced widowhood is a murder of living human being. It involves killing of human passions, feelings and emotions. You are butchering your own daughters in cold blood.'

Another feature of this intellectual exercise was that although the particular reformers were operating within the realm of their own particular religious group, their perception was universal. Raja Rammohan Roy believed that different religions were just national version of universal ethical teachings. He conceived of Brahmo Samaj as a universal religion and defended the common indispensable monotheism as the soundest moral principle of all true religions. Keshub Chandra Sen uttered this more unambiguously in the following words:

'Whoever worships the true God daily must learn to recognise all his fellow countrymen as brethren. Caste would vanish in such a state of society. If I believe that my God is one, and that he has created us all, I must at the same time instinctively, and with all the warmth of natural feelings, look upon all around me—whether Parsees, Hindus, Mohammadans or Europeans—as my brethren.'

7.5 CULTURAL-IDEOLOGICAL RESISTANCE AND INCIPIENT NATIONALISM

Along with reason, the nineteenth century reformers and intellectuals also absorbed the idea of justice and individual conscience. It was instrumental in linking the resistance to social protests in early colonial India. We see production of plays like *Nil-Darpan* and *Jamindar Darpan*. These voices of conscientious protest were to later evolve into political nationalism one that is exemplified in

production of Bankim's *Anandmath* and its voice of passionate love for motherland. Even though it finds place in a tangential form in the writings of some of these reformers, the idea of embryonic nationalism can be traced there. Lokhitwadi, for example wrote:

'The British rule in India is not eternal; we shall also become wise by learning Western science and technology, and we should endeavour to excel and beat them on their own ground. It is only then that we shall begin gradually to demand power. In order to remove our discontent the British might part with some power. The more power they give the more will it whet our appetite for it and the British may begin to oppose our demands. If they do so we may perhaps have to do what the Americans did when they drove away the English from their land.'

A similar observation of Dayanand Saraswati shows his internal turmoil when he says that the most oppressive indigenous ruler is far better than the most benevolent alien ruler. Colonial administrators ridiculed Indian men for being weak, non-martial and effeminate. There was some kind of self-criticism among the educated Indians too along the similar lines. We can trace such ideas to earlier social reformers and in this ideological project they tried to emulate the ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Implicitly, they placed in opposition the values of hegemonic masculinity to a femininity defined by weakness, indecisiveness, and a lack of virility. The ideas in this incipient form were first expressed in cultural domain but subsequently were to flower into full-blown nationalism which called upon Indians to be men and free their motherland from the British with force if necessary. Swami Dayanand's interpretation of Bible is quite literal and did not capture the symbolic content many of the myths in the texts. He also shows concern for consumption and food habits and advocated vegetarianism and supported cow-protection leagues although his plea was based on economic value and utilitarian logic. With regard to Vedas, Dayanand assumed that they contained eternal, universal wisdom and believed them to be source of all moral principles and thought that they anticipated modern scientific truths. Such textual strategies might have been based on the realisation that the Hindu's use of multiple scriptures in self-defence was not likely to cut much ice with the Christian Missionaries. By claiming a supernatural and exclusive 'truth' status for the Vedas, 'Hinduism", which was more of a congeries of different social-cultural and ritualistic practices, it too can be claim a status of rational and 'world' religion. Obviously, cultural revivalism of Dayanand Saraswati had political undertones to it and it had counter-aggressive aspects in that it sought to reclaim lost cultural territory to the colonial state.

Swami Vivekananda, who inherited the spiritual legacy of Sri Ram Krishna also sought to fortify Hindu self-pride. He had toured extensively throughout India during 1887-1893 and apart from spiritual gains that they might have brought in their wake, he was particularly moved by the material impoverishment of the people under the colonial rule. He had the heritage of Ram Krishna's religious humanism which taught no creed and dogma, but only human uplift as its supreme goal. He declared that religion is not for empty bellies. Realizing the weaknesses that had crept into institutionalised Hinduism, he felt offended by flamboyant meaningless rituals and oppressive mechanism of priesthood. He understood that social inequalities and fake religion nourished each other and it was the prime cause of India's spiritual downfall. For the religion to be meaningful, it ought to strive for collective salvation. For him, therefore, religion was not

individual subject matter but a crucial collective concern. Criticizing expenditure on maintenance of rituals he condemned extravagant expenditure on idols and temples while real creation of God, the living human beings died of hunger and disease. In a manner of introspection he was self-critical of degenerated Hinduism but also equally concerned about restoring the glory of classical Hinduism and he tried to demonstrate that by claiming a victory of Indian spiritualism over crass Western materialism and this is evident from his Speeches at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.

7.6 LIMITS OF CULTURAL-IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE IN A COLONIAL MILIEU

The cultural-ideological battle in the nineteenth century was two-fold. Firstly, the encounter between Western and Indigenous cultural forms impressed upon the intellectual with reforming zeal the need to revitalise the decadent elements of their own traditional culture. There were precedents of such reforms in pre-colonial India from time to time and hence, it can be safely said that nineteenth century reform and its agenda were not merely stimulated by the impact of Western education. However, the speedy intrusion of colonial cultural and ideological hegemony left its imprints on many cultural experiments of the nineteenth century. In the religious domain, the reformers tried to remove idolatry, polytheism and priestly control of rituals and scriptural knowledge. Since literacy was limited and confined to few, the reformers made use of mass-propaganda techniques and oral transmission of their ideas through vernacular languages in order to break the shackles of priestly oppression and exploitation by simplifying religious rituals and attacking superstitious ideas and religious dogmas. For this purpose, they translated religious texts into vernacular languages and reinterpreted them in the light of reason and logic. However, the impact of the ideas of these intellectuals was limited to small minority of people especially they remained confined to educated middle classes in most cases. The mass of people still continued to embrace traditional socio-cultural practices and principles of caste-hierarchy. Traditions die very hard and they continued to have their emotive appeal.

The early urge to challenge colonial cultural hegemony can be seen from the fact that none of the reformers advocated a blind imitation of Western cultural norms, something that happened in Japan after the Meiji Restoration in the name of modernisation. All intrusions in cultural territory were challenged by one or the other intellectual. This cultural defense found expression in attempt to give a new lease of life to traditional culture by reinterpreting it in the light of new ideological currents coming from Western world. But at the same time, we find that most of intellectuals favoured use of vernacular languages and stressed alternate system of education with modification in the indigenous pattern of education. They also emphasised Indian art and literature, did not dump Indian dress or food and persons like Swami Dayanand and Vivekanand strongly defended the main tenets of their religions. Raja Ram Mohan Roy debated religious points with Christian Missionaries.

7.7 SUMMARY

The cultural encounter between the British colonial rulers and the Indian colonised people was long perceived as a process of one-sided acculturation by which Indian educated elites adopted and assimilated the cultural norms and ethos of the English-speaking rulers. But like any other cultural encounter, it was never a stimulus-response type of relation. There were elements of selective appropriation of culture on both sides although being the conquerors, the British enjoyed political domination. The aim of colonial education was to transmit hegemonic colonial cultural norms and, in the process, create an educated elite who were to serve as intermediaries between rulers and the ruled and to fit Indians in European concepts of work and social relations. These cultural imperialist objectives of the British were contested by the nineteenth century Indian reformers and intellectuals. Although the intellectuals and reformers exhibited ambivalences peculiar to such cultural encounters, they never adopted a strategy of indiscriminate imitation. This Unit has highlighted some important aspects of such resistance on the part of indigenous intellectuals.

7.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the main forms of cultural resistance developed by early Indian intellectuals against colonial cultural hegemony.

2) In what ways the early cultural-ideological resistance was related to nationalism?

3) What were the limitations of cultural-ideological resistance in a colonial situation?

UNIT 8 TOWARDS RADICAL AND MASS POLITICS – SWADESHI MOVEMENT*

Structure

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Background

8.3 Partition of Bengal

8.4 Swadeshi Movement

8.5 Cult of Violence

8.6 Impact of Swadeshi Movement

8.7 Summary

8.8 Exercises

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The failure of moderate politics by the end of the nineteenth century set a reaction within the Congress circle and this led to the emergence of the extremist trend in nationalist politics. The moderates were criticised for their politics of mendicancy. In fact, this politics of extremism gained popularity in three main regions under the leadership of Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharastra and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab, but in the other areas extremism was less powerful if not totally absent. In this Unit, we will discuss the reasons for the origin, development, and decline of the Swadeshi movement. We will also briefly discuss the rise of the revolutionary movement after the decline of Swadeshi.

8.2 BACKGROUND

There were many factors behind the rise of extremism. In the opinion of some historians, it emerged from the faction fighting which had become prominent in every level of organised political life in India. While in Bengal there was rivalry between Surendra Nath Banerjee on one hand and the more radical Motilal Ghosh on the other, there also developed a faction fighting between Aurobindo Ghosh on one hand, and Bipin Chandra Pal, Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay, on the other side. In Maharashtra, there was competition between Gokhale and Tilak for controlling the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. In Madras, three factions, the Mylapore clique, the Egmore Clique and the suburban elites jostled with each other for gaining supremacy. In Punjab, the Arya Samaj became divided after the death of its founder Dayanand Saraswati into the moderate college group and the radical revivalist group. In that sense the schism in the Congress between the extremists and the moderates was being witnessed in every sphere of public life in India around this time.

But, this emergence of extremism cannot be explained in terms of factionalism alone. There was a great deal of frustration with moderate politics. The Congress

* Resource Person: Dr. Rajsekhar Basu

under moderate leadership was governed by one-sided constitution. Although after repeated attempts by Tilak a new constitution was drafted and ratified in 1899, it was never given a proper trial. The Congress was also in a financial crisis as the Capitalists did not contribute and the patronage from the Rajas and the landed elite was insufficient. At the same time, the zeal for social reform on the part of the moderates, which was inspired by the liberalism of the west, also went against popular orthodoxy. This came to a surface during the Poona Congress of 1895, when the moderates proposed to have a national social conference concurrently with regular succession of the Congress. The orthodox leaders like Tilak argued that the social conference would ultimately split the Congress and the proposal was finally drafted. However, by this time moderate politics has reached a dead end and most of their demands had remained unfulfilled. This ultimately worked as a major factor behind the emergence of extremism. However, the anger against colonial rule was actually fuelled by the moderates through their critique of economic nationalism.

The strategies of the Curzonian administration further increased the anger of the nationalists. Lord Curzon believed in the despotic imperialism which had been advocated by ideologues like Fitzjames Stephens and Lytton Strachey in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Curzon was responsible for the reconstitution of the Calcutta Corporation through the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act of 1899, which reduced the number of elected representatives in it. The Indian Universities Act which was also endorsed by Curzon placed Calcutta University under complete government control. Furthermore, the Indian Official Secret Amendment Act of 1904 restricted the freedom of the press.

8.3 PARTITION OF BENGAL

However, the oppressive regime of Curzon is mostly associated with his decision to partition Bengal in 1905, ostensibly to weaken the Bengali nationalists, who had been controlling the Congress. But, rather than weakening the Congress, the Curzonian measures offered the opportunity to the extremist leaders to take control of the Congress and put it in a path of direct confrontation with the colonial rule. The partition of Bengal led to a radicalising in nationalist politics and this was witnessed in the method of agitation, and the change from the old political methods of prayer and petition to that of passive resistance. This meant opposition to colonial rule through violation of its unjust laws, boycott of British goods and institutions and development of indigenous alternatives i.e., Swadeshi and national education. The ideological inspiration of this new politics was drawn from a revivalist discourse influenced by orientalism. The Swadeshi movement which gained popularity in Bengal and some other parts of India was based on an imagined golden past and used symbols from a reconstructed history to arouse nationalist passion. This was a reaction to the gendered discourse of colonialism, which had sought to establish links between masculinity and political domination. Subsequently, this inspired a section of the nationalists to recover their virility in the kshatriyahood of the imagined Aryan past. In many places, historical figures were projected as national heroes. Tilak started the Shivaji festival in Maharastra and this became popular in Bengal during the Swadeshi period. In fact, the advocates of the Swadeshi were also influenced by Vivekananda's idea of 'alternative manliness' which combined western concepts of modernity with the Brahmanical tradition of spiritual celebration of asceticism. Thereafter, a physical

cultural movement started with great enthusiasm and gymnasium sprung in different parts of Bengal, ostensibly to reclaim the physical prowess. But, the emphasis remained on spiritual power and self-discipline which was also privileged in the western idea of masculinity.

The Swadeshi movement began as an agitation against the decision of Curzon to partition of Bengal in 1905. The decision on the part of the colonial bureaucracy was explained in terms of administrative reasons arising out of the geographical spread and linguistic diversities within the presidency. However, the intention to safeguard the interests of Assam seemed to have been the most important consideration behind the policy decision on the part of the colonial state. In 1897, the Lusai Hills were transformed; Assam did not become a Lieutenant Governor's province. When Lord Curzon arrived in India, he went on a tour to Assam in 1900. During his visit, the scheme was revised again and the European tea planters preferred a maritime outlet nearer than Calcutta to reduce their dependence on the Assam-Bengal railways. Curzon drew up a scheme in his Minute of Territorial Redistribution of India in May-June 1903, which was later published in the Risley Papers of December, 1903. The scheme proposed the transfer of Chittagong division to Dhaka and Mymensingh to Assam, Chotanagpur to the Central provinces. Bengal would receive in turn Sambalpur and the feudatory states from the Central Provinces and Ganjam district and Vizapatnam Agency Tracts from Madras. In the following months the scheme gradually expanded although secretly, albeit through addition to the list of transfer district. The final scheme was embodied in Curzon's dispatch of February 2, 1905 to the Secretary of States Broderick who reluctantly accepted it without even a proper parliamentary debate on July 19, the partition of Bengal was finally announced and it was implemented three months later on October 16, a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was formed which comprised of all the districts in Chittaganj, Dhaka and Rajshahi division as well as Hill Tippera, Malda and Assam.

In fact, it was the anti-Bengali feelings of the colonial bureaucracy which Curzon inherited even before he became the Viceroy and the desire to weaken this politically articulate community seems to have prompted the move behind the partition. Curzon believed that the partition would destroy the dominance of the Bengali *bhadralok* who were land owners, moneylenders, professional and clerical classes, belonging mostly to the three upper castes of Brahmins, Ksatriyas and Vaidyas. These castes had monopolised education and employment to the virtual exclusion of all other communities and this had been the main source of their political power. So, Curzon believed that to break this dominance of the *bhadralok*, the linguistic identity of the other communities had been given prominence by the colonial bureaucracy. At the same time, Curzon by creating a province in Eastern Bengal sought to sow the seeds of disunity between the Muslims who were majority of the population and the Hindus who were minority in that region. In his speech deliberated in Dhaka, in February 1904, Curzon categorically stated in the new province of eastern Bengal with Dhaka as its head quarter that Muslims would enjoy a unity which they had enjoyed since the time of the old Muslim rule.

8.4 SWADESHI MOVEMENT

However, the partition, rather than dividing the Bengalis, united them through the anti-partition agitation. The Curzonian administration had ignored the fact that a Bengali identity cutting across narrow interests groups, class, as well as regional barriers were emerging in Bengal. The geographical mobility and the evolution of modern communication again had led to a horizontal solidarity. The dismal state of the economy of Bengal also created a volatile situation. The people's faiths in the providential British connections were shaken. The shrinkage of opportunity for educated Bengalis and consecutive bad weathers in the early twentieth century made life miserable for the middle classes. Rajat Ray has argued that the Swadeshi collection based on a political alliance between the Calcutta leaders and their East Bengali sympathisers brought about a revolution in the political structure of the Bengal society. The agitation against the partition had started in 1903, but became stronger and more organised after the scheme was finally announced and implemented as well in 1905. In the beginning it had the aim of securing the annulment of the partition, but it soon expanded into a more broad-based movement, known as the Swadeshi movement. The Swadeshi movement, itself integrated a whole range of political and social issues. Sumit Sarkar has identified four major trends in the Swadeshi, mainly the moderate trend, constructive Swadeshi, political extremism and revolutionary nationalism. In Sarkar's opinion, all these trends were present more or less throughout this period.

The moderates began to criticise the partition scheme ever since it was announced in 1903, they initially thought that the British would accept their arguments which they presented through petitions, prayers and public meetings. But, these efforts hardly succeeded, and in 1905, when the partition was announced, they were the first to devise a wider Swadeshi movement. On July 17, 1905 Surendra Nath Banerjee in a meeting in Calcutta gave a call for the boycott of British goods and institutions. In another mass meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall on august 7, a formal boycott resolution was passed, which marked the beginning of the Swadeshi movement. In fact, it was for the first time that the moderates were trying to mobilise sections of the population other than the literate section of the Bengali society. Indeed, this explains why some of the moderate leaders got involved in labour strikes. At the same time the leaders of the Swadeshi movement also emphasised on self-reliance, village level organisation and constructive programmes to develop indigenous or Swadeshi brands which could be alternative for foreign goods. At the same time, national institutions for educating the people were being established as substitutes for the colonial institutions. Sarkar has argued that two main currents were visible in 1905—a non-political constructive Swadeshi with strong emphasis on self-development endeavours and political extremism with its main emphasis on passive resistance.

The Bengal extremists in the initial period were more inclined to the programme of constructive Swadeshi. The programmes included efforts to manufacture daily necessities, national education, arbitration courts and village organisations. In the 1890's, much before the Swadeshi movement, there had been emphasis on Swadeshi enterprise which was reflected in the establishment of companies like the Bengal Chemicals. In 1901, another factory was started to manufacture porcelain. The national education movement was led by people like Satish

Chandra Mukherjee who founded the Bhagavat Chatuspathi and the Dawn Society in Calcutta. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay founded the Saraswat Ayatan and Rabindra Nath Tagore founded the Ashram at Shantiniketan, Bhirbhum. The emphasis on non-political constructive programmes based on the principle of *atma-shuddhi* or self-strengthening in some cases were also linked to religious revivalism. A section of the Swadeshi leaders believed that Hinduism would actually provide a platform for establishing unity for the whole nation. The revivalist influence was also reflected in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore in the years between 1901 and 1906. In his Swadeshi Samaj address which was delivered in 1904 Tagore outlined the meaning of *atma-shakti* and this later influenced the popularity of Swadeshi enterprise in Bengal. National education moved forward with the founding of the Bengal National College and School in 1906. In Bakherganj, the Swadeshi Bhandav Samity also organised arbitration committees to settle local disputes.

However, the extremists by 1906 were arguing that without freedom there could not be any move towards the regeneration of national life. The movement soon intended into a new phase and it came to espouse the slogan of complete independence or Swaraj. The extremists favoured the boycott of British goods and institutions, development of indigenous alternatives, violation of unjust laws and violent movement if necessary to confront the oppression of the colonial state. Thus, it was argued by Sarkar that the Swadeshi movement anticipated much of the strategies inherent in the Gandhian programmes, with the exception of the use of violence. The extremist leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh were aware of the importance of mass mobilisation and therefore emphasised on religion as an agency for reaching the masses. Religious revivalism gave a new dimension to this politics. The *Bhagavat Gita* served as source of spiritual inspiration for the Swadeshi volunteers. Historians have pointed out that Hindu religious symbols and Sakta imageries were also frequently used to mobilise the masses. But, these developments also impacted on the minds of the Muslim masses and the lower caste Vaishnavite peasantry. Such development possibly explains the reasons behind the alienation of the Muslims from the Swadeshi movement.

During the Swadeshi movement, mass mobilisation also took place through the Samitis. Before the beginning of the five principal Samities, such organisations had been engaged in the propagation of Swadeshi message, Swadeshi craft, education and arbitration court. But, the mass mobilization programmes failed since the Samitis were not interested in extending their activities beyond the ranks of the educated Bengali Hindu *bhadralok*. The upper caste Hindu leadership, drawn mostly from the landed classes further alienated the lower caste peasantry who feared their coercive powers. The Swadeshi leaders deployed the tool of social coercion or social boycott to produce consent among the reluctant participants. The reluctance on the part of the substantial section of the ordinary masses can be explained in terms of interests from those of the elite leaders. They found it difficult to purchase the Swadeshi alternatives which were dearer than British goods. At the level of education, the national schools were also for less in number when compared with the government run educational institutions. The lower caste peasantry in Bengal like the Rajbanshis and Namasudras, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out, had also started developing their own corporate identities, based on their notions of social mobility and self-esteem which the Swadeshi leaders failed to accommodate in their programmes. The Swadeshi volunteers also tried to mobilise the workers employed in the foreign

companies. But, they could only penetrate into the ranks of the white collar workers, while the vast body of migrant labour from other parts of Eastern India and Northern India remained untouched. This possibly was one of the reasons behind the failure of the Boycott movement. By 1908, political extremism declined and this was followed by a more radical phase of revolutionary terrorism. The Surat split of 1907 definitely encouraged such developments. The well-known moderate leaders like Pheroze Shah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha and Gopal Krishna Gokhale expressed their apprehensions over the activities of the extremists. In fact, Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the most prominent extremist leaders favoured a policy of restraint and wanted reconciliation between the moderates and the extremists. But, the radicalism generated by the Swadeshi movement in Bengal gave a new twist to the politics of the Congress at the All India level.

The 1907 session of the Congress, which was to be held in Poona which was a stronghold of the extremist politics, was shifted to Surat by the moderate leaders to avoid all the disturbances. Lala Lajpat Rai's name was proposed by the extremists for the post of the Congress President, while the moderate candidate was Rash Behari Ghosh. But, Rai did not want a split and he refused the nomination and so the fight between the two contending groups was centred on the question of retention or rejection of the four Resolutions passed in the Calcutta session. By this time, the differences between Surendra Nath Banerjee and Aurobindo Ghosh had reached a level where they could not be reconciled and the same happened between Gokhale and Tilak. The session at Surat ended in a scuffle over the election of Rash Behari Ghosh with shoes flying, chairs stopping and men running for shelter. After this incident, Tilak was willing to reunite the Congress but Mehta was reluctant. The Congress of 1908, known as the Mehta Congress was only attended by the moderates who were firm in their loyalty to the Raj. But, the extremist politics also lost its direction since Tilak died soon after and Aurobindo took up the life of a hermit. The two factions remained separate and it was only in 1920 that Gandhi once again united them.

8.5 CULT OF VIOLENCE

By 1908, political Swadeshi was certainly on the decline and had taken the shape of individual violence. Sarkar has argued that this shift from the non-violent creed to one of violence was primarily due to the failure of the mass mobilisation efforts of the nationalists. Bandyopadhyay has argued that the culture of violence as the mode of political protest had an appeal in India even after the suppression of the revolt of 1857. The writings of Bankim Chandra and Vivekananda infused a sense of masculinity among the younger generation of the educated Bengali youth, who also developed a sense of national pride and social service. However, the real story of revolutionary movement in Bengal began with the formation of four groups, three in Calcutta and one in Midnapore. The first such outfit was the Midnapore Society which was founded in 1902 and this was followed by the founding of a gymnasium at the Ballygunj Circular Road by Sarala Ghosal. In March, 1902, Dhaka Anushilan Samiti was founded by Satish Chandra Basu. However, the revolutionary movement did not gain much importance till 1905 and when the Swadeshi movement began it definitely brought about an upsurge in the activities of the secret societies in Bengal. In Calcutta, the Anushilan Samiti was headed by Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the younger brother of Aurobindo Ghosh, Hemchandra Kanungo and Prafulla Chaki. In August 1906, the first Swadeshi dacoity was organised in Rangpur to raise fund and a bomb manufacturing unit

set up at Maniktala at Calcutta. The activists made it a plan to assassinate oppressive officials and spies and commit burglary in the houses of the wealthy Saha merchants who had earlier refused to stop dealing in foreign goods. The movement reached a point of climax with the attack on the life of the Presidency Magistrate Kingsford on April 30, 1908 at Muzaffarpur by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. Subsequently the entire group at Maniktala including Aurobindo and Barindra Kumar Ghosh were arrested by the police for encouraging terrorist activities against the British Government.

This movement failed to achieve in terms of direct gains and most of its attempts ended up in failures. They did not believe that assassination or dacoities would bring about India's liberation, as was Aurobindo's original idea regarding an open armed revolution. However, it would be wrong to argue that they did not gain much, rather it has been pointed out that they achieved a lot. The hanging of Khudiram and the Maniktala Bomb Conspiracy Trial was given a great deal of publicity by the press and was immortalised in Bengali folk songs. All these definitely influenced the imagination, which became very much critical of the oppressive rule of the British raj. C.R. Das, who was still to achieve to fame as a barrister, appeared as the defence counsel lawyer for Aurobindo and argued that if the government considered preaching the principle of freedom as crime then the accused was surely an offender. Aurobindo was acquitted, but his younger brother Barindra and Ullaskar Dutta were sentenced to death and ten others were deported for life. However, on appeal the death sentences were reduced to life imprisonment and the terms of some other sentences were also reduced. The Maniktala Bomb Case Trial forced the revolutionaries to go underground and it became decentralised. But, it was not eliminated and continued as an effective alternative to reduce the earlier mendicant policies of the moderates. Revolutionary nationalism had acquired political legitimacy among a section of the masses who believed that revolutionary activities could drive out the British from the Indian soil. When the Morley-Minto Reforms were announced in 1909, many of them believed that it was the fear generated by revolutionary activities that had forced the British government to take such steps. The appointment of S.P. Sinha as the law member in the viceroy's Executive Council was surely the result of the pressure generated by these activities. The annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1911 was also to some measure dictated by the upsurge of popular pressure created by the revolutionary nationalist. The decision of the annulment of partition was also followed by the decision to transfer the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. The decision was itself a matter of great significance, since it brought about the end of Bengali dominance in the national politics of India. In this context, it could be argued that this decision did fulfil Lord Curzon's aim of weakening the Bengali politicians.

The annulment of partition did not bring an end to revolutionary terrorism. In fact, it had not been generated solely by partition. The revolutionary activities now moved away from Bengal to Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, where the Bengali activists were joined by the Punjabis returning from North America. These people had formed the revolutionary Ghadar party to carry out revolutionary activities against the colonial state. In 1912, the Ghadarites were involved in attempt to assassinate the viceroy Lord Hardinge. In September, 1914 the Punjabi Ghadarites who had boarded the Japanese ship *Kamagata Maru*, clashed with the British army near Calcutta. The outbreak of the First World War led to even more grand schemes of organising armed revolts in the Indian army. The revolutionaries

were interested in seeking help from Germany and Japan. Rash Behari Bose stationed in Lahore tried to organise an army revolt throughout northern India. But, his attempts failed to evoke much response from the sepoys and he finally ran away to Japan. In Bengal the revolutionaries, under the leadership of Jatin Mukherjee tried to smuggle arms manufactured by the Roda Company in Germany. However, this attempt was not well organised and Mukherjee himself died in a battle with the British police near Balasore, Orissa. The repression unleashed by the British government and the imposition of the defence of India Act of 1915 struck a blow to the revolutionary attacks in India. But, the spirit of the revolutionary violence and this trend in some places merged with the popular movements which were witnessed when the Sedition Committee made efforts to introduce the draconian Rowlatt Bills. It was Mahatma Gandhi who now becomes figure of action and he initiated a new phase in politics, when the focus shifted from violence to non-violence and from elite action to mass action.

8.6 IMPACT OF SWADESHI MOVEMENT

The anti-partition agitation and the Swadeshi movement were responsible for the spread of national ideas beyond the official and elite circles. In fact, these agitations were the formative experiences for the students and teachers who gave nationalism its main populist, idealist, progressive and even revolutionary meanings. News, debates and folklore entered into the public culture in most major urban centres. On the other hand, police repression was portrayed in songs, poems, cartoons, editorials and in public oratory. Incidentally, Victorian racism, merged with British brutality, stood as something opposed to Indian national aspirations. Nationalism became a political movement, which despite being small as compared to the vast population of the indigenous society, moved decisively beyond national moorings and attracted attention overseas. Several million Indians settled abroad also became involved in the movement. In California, activists among Punjabi Sikh farmers launched newspapers and raised funds to support the Indian cause.

More importantly, the new generation of Indian politicians that emerged in the movement came primarily from Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. The moderate leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale left his teaching position in History and Political Economy at Fergusson College, Pune in 1902 to enter full time politics. In 1895, he led the moderates as Congress President and like most moderates advocated social reform measures that were in the extremist agenda. Gokhale also founded the Servants of India Society, whose members took vows of poverty and service to the poor, especially to the poorest untouchable jatis in Hindu society who remained excluded. Another important leader, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, ran two newspapers *Kesari* in Marathi and the *Mahratta* in English, but he was opposed to social reform as a distraction from national goals.

Significantly, though the Congress nationalism spoke for everyone in native society, its public agitation also involved and provoked other official and unofficial social identities. The anti-partition movement witnessed the emergence of the cosmopolitan English literate youth whose professional prospect would be curtailed in partition of Bengal. The majority of the English educated youth who came to Calcutta for their education went back to villages and towns and spread the message of Swadeshi. The popular appeal of Hindu devotionalism fanned the flames of movement among the poorest. The cosmopolitan literati invoked

the passion of the devotees excluded from the temple of patriotic love by tyranny of those who abuse their Goddess. The vernacular verses written by them expressed regional linguistic identities that were identified with the Indian nation.

In Eastern Bengal, Muslim leaders with various social identities, from various regions, ethnic groups and sects came together to form an old official identity, which later became a political public identity when they met at Dacca in 1906 to form the All India Muslim League. The League supported Curzon's partition plan and stood against the Congress as representatives of the Indian Muslim. In 1906, the Muslim League leaders felt that the creation of a separate East Bengal province would definitely benefit aspiring Muslims in Bengal and Assam. They believed that Congress opposition to the plan was derived from the economic implications for upper caste Hindu elites in Bengal. However, the Muslim leaders were not of one mind. Mohammed Ali Jinnah and many other Muslims believed that the Congress served the Muslim interest.

The aftermath of the Swadeshi movement led to unification of desperate political identities shaped by public activism which influenced most of the national leaders. Calcutta did remain as a centre of national sentiments, but groups in Poona, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow, Allahabad and places like Madras entered national politics. By the middle of 1910s, the differences between the moderates and the extremists waned. The new dilemma was to find common cause among forces, pulling the nation in different directions. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* written in Gujarati in 1909 and later in English in 1910 had presented a new version of nationalism in colonial India. At the same time, V.D. Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* had projected a more militant Hindu view of nationalism. In 1915, when Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, *Home Rule League* was active in major cities to propagate the idea of Indian independence. The nationalist leader Chittaranjan Das became involved in tackling the dilemma of defining the nation in terms of pragmatism. He and many others believed that the development in India should be based on India's distinctive, all inclusive national culture. But, while this call for a composite culture was repeatedly insisted by Gandhi as was reflected in his non-cooperation khilafat movement, the Hindu and the Muslim communalism could not be eliminated. The riot that followed the non-cooperation movement in 1920s proved beyond all doubts that the class and sectarian interest that had divided the Hindu and the Muslim in the years following the partition of Bengal, had continued to remain in India's body politics eliminating the high expressions of an all embracing nationalist movement.

8.7 SUMMARY

Swadeshi movement was a crowning achievement of nationalist politics. Disenchanted from the mendicant politics of the moderates and angered by the racist and divisive policies of the British, the young people all over India, but particularly in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab, became agitated. The partition of Bengal provided the spark to ignite the nationalist passion to a high pitch. A large number of people participated in the protest demonstrations organised by the nationalist leaders all over the province. Protests continued for quite some time. The repression by the colonial government and its apathy towards the demands of the people led the emergence of revolutionary nationalism which also spread in many parts of the country.

8.8 EXERCISES

1) What were the factors which led to the rise of Swadeshi movement?

2) Describe the variety of protest activities undertaken during the course of the Swadeshi movement.

3) Discuss the reasons for the decline of the Swadeshi movement.

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Indian National Movement

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Block

3

NATIONAL MOVEMENT – THE MASS PHASE-I

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BLOCK 3 NATIONAL MOVEMENT – THE MASS PHASE-I

Introduction

In this Block, we will discuss the passage of the national movement into more mass-based politics. After the decline of the Swadeshi movement, the nationalist politics entered a relatively quiet phase. The nationalist ranks were divided between the 'Moderates' and the 'Extremists'. The Government's policy was to unleash repression against 'Extremist' movement while offering concessions to the Moderates through the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. These Reforms also drove a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims by the provision of separate electorates to the Muslims. The 'Extremists' were also lying low after the imprisonment and deportation of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the withdrawal of some active Bengal leaders from politics. However, political dissatisfaction with the Morley-Minto Reforms grew over time. The period of the First World War proved to be a period of growing mass discontent, particularly caused by the hardships generated during this period. People were becoming restive. The two Home Rule Leagues, headed by Annie Besant and Tilak, were trying to organise people for the demand of home rule for India. There were also unity moves between the Congress and the Muslim League which pushed the nationalist politics at a higher level. We will discuss these issues in **Unit 9**.

It is generally agreed that the Gandhian method of popular mobilisation transformed the nature of nationalist politics in India. Gandhi adopted and applied these methods initially in his struggle against racist discrimination in South Africa. In India, the peasant protests in Champaran and Kheda, and the workers' protests in Ahmedabad provided Gandhi the ground to organise the protests according to his own tenet of Satyagraha. You will learn about these developments in **Unit 10**. The post-War years witnessed particularly hectic political activities. The Rowlatt Satyagraha, started by Gandhi against the draconian Act which gave the Government arbitrary powers, spread to various parts of the country. Unprecedented mass protests were witnessed in Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Amritsar and many other places. The Government responded with massive repression, the climax of which was seen in the Jallianwala Bagh where hundreds of unarmed people—men, women and children—were killed in cold blood. This was a great shock to the psyche of the country and turned the people decisively against colonialism. This was the 'turning point' which **Unit 11** will discuss. Rowlatt Satyagraha was soon followed by the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements which witnessed unprecedented public display of Hindu-Muslim solidarity. The Non-cooperation movement effectively utilised the grievances of peasants and urban people to mobilise them into anti-colonial protests. Most of India was galvanised with nationalist fervour and the Congress was re-energised and became truly mass-based. **Unit 12** deals with this phase of the nationalist mobilisation.

Unit 13 looks into revolutionary nationalist organisations and individuals whose memories are still imprinted on the minds of the people. A number of dedicated, selfless and strongly nationalist persons, such as Ramprasad Bismil, Chadrashekhar Azad, Surya Sen, Jatin Das, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev,

grew impatient with the mainstream nationalist politics. They sought a different route to achieve complete independence of India from colonial rule. Initially deriving from anti-colonial militant Hindu ideology, this trend slowly adopted socialist thinking which moved beyond religion, and declared its goal to be freedom from colonial rule and egalitarianism. These ideas were most clearly reflected in Bhagat Singh.

Finally, **Unit 14** discusses the constitutional activities of the nationalist leaders, particularly with regard to the Swaraj Party. This trend of nationalist politics, although veering away from the mainstream Gandhian politics, contributed significantly in exposing the sham which the colonial constitutional reforms introduced in India.

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UNIT 9 NATIONALIST POLITICS DURING THE WAR PERIOD*

Structure

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Impact of the War on India

9.3 Home Rule Movement

9.4 Lucknow Pact

9.5 Summary

9.6 Exercises

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The First World War broke out in 1914 and it continued till 1918. India being part of the British Empire automatically got involved in the war without any consent of its citizens. The war had its impact not only on socio-economic life of Indians but also on their political life. It would be interesting to learn about the major trends in Indian nationalist politics during the period of the First World War. We will first explain in this Unit the impact of the war on India and the response of Indians. Then we will discuss the initiatives taken by nationalist leaders to press for 'Home Rule'. You will also learn how during the course of the war the Muslim League and the divergent groups among the nationalists joined hands to put forward the demands for self-government for India. The signing of the Lucknow Pact in 1916 further strengthened the unity between Hindus and Muslims. Demands for more self-governing rights were raised by nationalists during the war period. This period in nationalist politics paved the ground for a more broad-based movement against the British.

9.2 IMPACT OF THE WAR ON INDIA

When the First World War broke out in 1914, there was a growing demand for self-government in spite of the divisive trends within the leadership of the Congress. Many had reservations about supporting the British in the war which was not in India's interest, but there were also people within India who believed that the cause of Indian independence would be served by helping the British government in its war efforts. The British government deployed huge number of Indian troops on various war fronts and many were killed and seriously injured in the battle. Apart from the loss of life India had to bear huge war debt. The bulk of revenue from India was extracted in the form of land revenue, salt tax and other taxes. During the war taxes were increased and for the first time a super-tax was imposed in 1917. As B.R. Tomlinson has calculated, 'The burden of taxation (excluding land revenue) per head of population rose from just over Rs. 1.5 in 1914-15 to just under Rs. 2.5 in 1918-19. The Government of India incurred over Rs. 105 crores worth of new net permanent debt during the war years, and over Rs. 108 crores' worth of net floating debt. Its annual expenditure on interest

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payments which ran at around Rs. 1.8 crores from 1914-17, increased to Rs. 10.9 crores in 1917-18 and to Rs. 12.2 crores in 1918-19'.

The burden of taxation as shown above because of the war affected mostly the common people. It was the rise in prices of food commodities due to taxes and the export of food to feed the army men which greatly aggravated the sufferings of people in India. This was also the period which witnessed crop failures in various parts of India. Not only did the poor peasants and the workers suffered during the war period but many peasant proprietors also lost the ownership of lands to non-cultivating classes who made profit out of speculative business during the war. The big industrial houses gained with the growth of industries during the war, but the working class suffered because of price hike and declining real wages. The consequent outcome was the strike by workers in different parts of India. So when one looks at the immediate consequences of the war on economic life of Indian people generally the picture that emerges is one of discontent and disillusionment. Apart from the economic hardships, forceful recruitment of Indians in the army and their sufferings in the war front agitated the minds of Indians against the British government. However there is also a perception that the upper gentry and the urban middle classes in India supported the British war efforts hoping more concessions from the British in sharing of power in India after the war. In the opinion of historian Hugh Tinker:

'The outbreak of war in 1914 had witnessed an extraordinary demonstration of loyalty and solidarity from all sections of the peoples of India. It might have been expected that princes and peasants would rally to the Raj in the hour of crisis, but the urban middle classes also competed in efforts to support the British cause, and only a fringe element of revolutionaries tried to exploit the possibility of Britain's difficulties to overthrow the Imperial power. Yet by the middle years of the war a mood of disillusionment had set in.'

It is not true to observe that there was an 'extraordinary demonstration of loyalty and solidarity' from all sections of Indians to the British government in its war efforts but there was a definite thinking among a section of the Indian nationalist leaders that support to the British war effort would help them in achieving self-government. Nationalist leaders failed to realise at that stage that the warring nations were fighting basically to protect their colonial empires not for the interest of the colonised people. What is important to take note is that the war in general created discontent among Indians and provided the Indian nationalist leadership opportunity to reformulate its strategy to fight for self-government. The war period also witnessed the rise in revolutionary movements to overthrow the British government. Another important development was the rise of the Home Rule movement.

9.3 HOME RULE MOVEMENT

The nationalist movement in India faced a major challenge with the split of the Indian National Congress into two distinct groups – 'Moderates' and 'Extremists' and the formation of the All India Muslim League in the first decade of the twentieth century. Many nationalist leaders saw an opportunity with the outbreak of the First World War to bring the divergent interest groups together to make serious efforts for achieving self-government. The voice of extremism within

the Congress got weakened in the absence of leaders like Aurobindo Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. When Tilak was released from jail in 1914 he was of the opinion that without the support of the Congress it would be difficult to organise and sustain an effective movement against the British. But moderate leaders like Pherozeshah Mehta were not inclined to allow the extremists back into the Congress. Even then there was a growing feeling within the Congress that the moderate-extremist antagonism was irrelevant in the present context when a united opposition to the British might help in attaining self-government. In this backdrop one needs to look at the developments in Madras under the leadership of Annie Besant and in Maharashtra under the leadership of Tilak to launch the movement demanding Home Rule for India.

Annie Besant was the President of the Theosophical Society which had its headquarters in Madras. She became a theosophist after coming under the influence of Madame Blavatsky of Theosophical Society. She now settled in India. By joining the Congress in 1914 she moved from educational and socio-religious activity to the arena of politics. She had planned to persuade the Congress leaders for re-entry of the extremists in the Congress and to launch an agitation to compel the British government to concede the demand for Home Rule. Meanwhile Tilak after his release from jail in 1914 realised the need of developing a broad based political movement in place of his earlier policy of extremism. Tilak found an opportunity in the line of thinking of Annie Besant to build a base for political activity but at the same time he was careful in keeping an independent political base for himself. Therefore although he supported Besant's decision of forming a Home Rule League he announced his plan to form a separate Home Rule League for the Marathi-speaking parts of India. Annie Besant's Home Rule League was based at Madras and its reach was all India. In 1917 membership of the two leagues reached 60,000.

Through newspapers and pamphlets both in English and vernacular languages the Home Rule Leagues wanted to educate people first for an organised political movement at an all India level to pressurise the British to concede the demand for Home Rule. As editor of the "New India" newspaper Besant was critical of the colonial government and advocated that in place of piecemeal reforms Indians must be united in demanding self-government or Home Rule. Attempts were made to create a strong public opinion for Home Rule. This in a way also paved the ground for mass politics at a later stage in the national movement. It is said that numerically there was much greater participation of people and more visible enthusiasm and emotion compared to the early Congress agitation. Membership in both the organisations gradually increased and their growing strength was felt by the British government. In Bombay the government tried to impose ban on Tilak on the ground that Home Rule demand was seditious and the Madras government debarred Besant from entering Bombay Presidency and the Central Provinces and Berar. In 1917 Besant was interned by the Madras government and both the Congress and the Muslim League strongly protested the arrest of Besant. She was released later on in the same year. The government repression helped the Home Rule movement in gaining popularity. Besant was elected the President of the Indian National Congress at its annual session held at Calcutta in 1917.

The Speech Given by Annie Besant as the Congress President in 1917 [Excerpts]

For the first time in Congress history, you have chosen as your President one who, when your choice was made, was under the heavy ban of Government displeasure, and who lay interned as a person dangerous to public safety. While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative. I have no words with which to thank you, no eloquence with which to repay my debt. My deeds must speak for me, for words are too poor. I turn your gift into service to the Motherland; I consecrate my life anew to her in worship by action. All that I have and am, I lay on the Altar of the Mother, and together we shall cry, more by service than by words: VANDE MATARAM.

Why India Demands Home Rule

India demands Home Rule for two reasons, one essential and vital, the other less important but necessary: Firstly, because Freedom is the birthright of every Nation; secondly, because her most important interests are now made subservient to the interests of the British Empire without her consent, and her resources are not utilised for her greatest needs. It is enough only to mention the money spent on her Army, not for local defence but for Imperial purposes, as compared with that spent on primary education.

Source: Annie Besant, *The Case For India,* at *www.fullbooks.com*

The Speech by Tilak at Nasik in 1917, at the first anniversary of the forming of the Home Rule League

I am young in spirit though old in body. I do not wish to lose this privilege of youth. Whatever I am going to speak today is eternally young. The body might grow old, decrepit and it might perish, but the soul is immortal. Similarly, if there might be an apparent lull in our home rule activities, the freedom of the spirit behind it is eternal and indestructible, and it will secure liberty for us. Freedom is my birthright. So long as it is awake within me, I am not old. No weapon can cut this spirit, no fire can burn it, no water can wet it, no wind can dry it. We ask for home rule and we must get it. The science which ends in home rule is the science of politics and not the one which ends in slavery. The science of politics is the 'veda' of the country. You have a soul and I only want to awaken it. I want to tear off the blind that has been let down by ignorant, conniving and selfish people. The science of politics consists of two parts. The first is divine and the second is demonic. The slavery of a nation constitutes the latter. There cannot be a moral justification for the demonic part of the science of politics. A nation which might justify this, is guilty of sin in the sight of God. Some people do and some do not have the courage to declare what is harmful for them. Political and religious teaching consists in giving the knowledge of this principle.

Contd...

Religious and political teachings are not separate, though they appear to be so on account of foreign rule. All philosophies are included in the science of politics.

Who does not know the meaning of home rule? Who does not want it? Would you like it if I enter your house and take possession of your kitchen? I must have the right to manage the affairs in my own house. We are told we are not fit for home rule. A century has passed and the British Rule has not made us fit for home rule; now we will make our own efforts and make ourselves fit for it. To offer irrelevant excuses, to hold out any temptations and to make other offers will be putting a stigma on English policy. England is trying to protect the small state of Belgium with India's help; how can it then say that we should not have home rule? Those who find fault with us are avaricious people. But there are people who find fault even with the all-merciful God. We must work hard to save the soul of our nation without caring for anything. The good of our country consists in guarding this birthright. The Congress has passed this home rule resolution. In practical politics some futile objections are raised to oppose our desire for *swaraj*. Illiteracy of the bulk of our people is one of such objections; but to my mind it ought not to be allowed to stand in our way. It would be sufficient for us even if the illiterate in our country have only a vague conception of *swaraj*, just as it all goes well with them if they simply have a hazy idea about God. Those who can efficiently manage their own affairs may be illiterate; but they are not idiots. They are as intelligent as any other educated man and if they could understand their immediate concerns they would not find any difficulty in grasping the principle of *swaraj*. If illiteracy is not a disqualification in civil law there is no reason why it should not be so in nature's law also. Even the illiterate are our bretheren; they have the same rights and are actuated by the same aspirations. It is, therefore, our bounden duty to awaken the masses. Circumstances have changed, and are favourable. The voice has gone forth 'Now or Never'. Rectitude and constitutional agitation is alone what is expected of you. Turn not back, and confidently leave the ultimate issue to the benevolence of the Almighty.

Source: Ravindra Kumar *(ed.), Selected Documents of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vol.3.*

Although the Home Rule movement had support mainly among the middle classes yet it succeeded in reaching those areas where national politics till then could not reach. Both Tilak and Besant were of the opinion that broadening the base of nationalist support was essential along with unity among various groups of nationalists, otherwise the British would play one faction against other and refuse reforms. In the government perception the Home Rule movement was an attempt for the first time of a united, organised, and militant all India opposition to the British rule. The Home Rule agitation was definitely a departure from the earlier politics of the Congress although it might not have carried the characteristics of militant nationalism. It was alleged that the Home Rule agitation tried to excite racial feeling and encourage animosity against the British government. Analysing the government policy towards the movement launched by Annie Besant, historian Peter Robb has shown that government opinion was divided between repression and concession to tackle the movement under Besant and Tilak. While the Home Rule movement was considered as seditious by a section within the local

government, at the same time some within the government were also worried of the popular support because of repressive measures adopted by the government. After careful consideration of the situation the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, announced to move further towards self-government and the proposed scheme of Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms was published in 1918. This action on the part of the government created division within the Congress regarding response towards the reforms. Besant argued at a special session of the Congress in September 1918 that the proposal of reforms should be amended making provision for complete provincial autonomy in five years. But both Besant and Tilak failed to make much inroads in the Congress politics and the national politics took a new turn after 1918. Commenting on the achievement and legacy of the Home Rule Movement it has been said that 'it created a generation of ardent nationalists who formed the backbone of the national movement in the coming years when, under the leadership of the Mahatma, it entered its truly mass phase. The Home Rule Leagues also created organisational links between town and country which were to prove invaluable in later years. And further, by popularising the idea of Home Rule or self-government, and making it a commonplace thing, it generated a widespread pro-nationalist atmosphere in the country'. (Bipan Chandra and others, *(eds.), India's Struggle for Independence*). Sumit Sarkar has also observed that the real importance of the Home Rule agitation was its extension to new areas, groups and a new generation.

9.4 LUCKNOW PACT

The first decade of the twentieth century was marked by the Swadeshi and boycott movement following the partition of Bengal, split of the Congress into two clear ideological groups, formation of the Muslim League and growth of radicalism as a means to achieve freedom. Popular discontent was growing against the British but at the same time there was lack of unity and organised united effort to challenge the British rule. The outbreak of the First World War compelled the British government to seek cooperation of Indian people for the British war efforts and politically conscious Indians found it an opportunity to press for demand for self-government. The overriding concern among various groups of Indian nationalists in the course of the First World War was to make unity of effort in opposition to the British rule. In this context the Lucknow Pact is considered as a major move towards solidarity between Hindus and Muslims.

The foundation of All India Muslim League in 1906 primarily to protect the interests of the Muslims by showing allegiance to the Muslims brought in open the difference between the Congress and the followers of the Muslim League. The British government on its part, by providing separate electorates to Muslims through the Reforms Act of 1909, further encouraged the divisive sentiment of the advocates of Muslim separatism. Leadership of the Muslim League was in the hands of the landed aristocracy. However situation began to change in the second decade of the twentieth century with certain developments in India as well as outside India. The repartition of Bengal in 1911 and the involvement of Britain in war against the Ottoman Empire in 1914 gave the feeling to many Muslims that they can no longer rely on the British government. In the war between Italy and Turkey in 1911 neutrality of Britain and the massacre of Muslims in Persia by Russia created a feeling among Muslims that Islam was in danger and the European powers were in league to dismember Turkey. Muslim

press in India helped in publicising this 'Islam in danger' fear and many Muslims resolved to sacrifice their lives to defend Islam if required. This development helped in creating a situation where nationalist oriented Muslims within the Muslim League worked towards rapprochement between the Congress and the League. A young group comprising of lawyers, journalists and others coming from small zamindari background felt the need to join hands with the Congress in the movement against the colonial rule. In Lucknow this group was known as the 'young party' and Wazir Hasan who represented the young Muslims succeeded in getting control over the Muslim League. He tried to bring the aims of the League closer in line with those of the Congress. The draft reforms scheme of the Muslim League prepared under the leadership of the younger group of Muslims had lot of similarities with the Congress except the demand for separate representation. The Congress also resolved, in spite of differences within, to move towards rapprochement with the League. The Congress agreed to respect the separate Muslim interest and to accept the separate electorates for Muslims. Both the Congress and the League were in an accommodating mood to have a workable political consensus. Members of both the Congress and the League met in Bombay in 1915 and the idea of a national government was supported. This was followed by a meeting of both the organisations at Lucknow in 1916 and in this meeting both agreed to a common joint demands and the agreement reached between them is known as the Lucknow Pact. Demand for self-government was declared as the immediate goal and the Congress agreed to accept the demand for separate electorates for Muslims. According to the Lucknow Pact Muslims were conceded separate electorates in seven states in which they were in a minority and got half of the elected seats in the Punjab and one third of the elected seats in the central legislature.

There were however critics among Muslims as well as Hindus opposing the Congress-League alliance. The Muslim landed classes and their allies whose interests were protected by the British were apprehensive of the growing nationalist feelings among Muslims and considered the alliance between the Congress and the League as threat to their existence. Urdu newspapers like the *Al-Bashir*, the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, *Al-Mizan*, etc. started a vilification campaign. In a rebuttal to such campaign Jinnah wrote in an editorial in the *Times of India*,

'Surely the Mahomedans who have shown the greatest self-restraint and control throughout these grave and momentous crises may be trusted to formulate their demands along with their Hindu leaders. Can there be a better opportunity than this that the Congress and the League should meet in one place and confer together as to the future of India?'

On the other hand, the Hindu Sabhas which came up in certain provinces denounced the seat sharing arrangement proposed by the Congress-League scheme. Particularly in UP where Muslims were allowed 30 per cent of seats in the council although numerically they constituted only 14 per cent of the population in the province there were angry protests. Despite the opposition, the Lucknow Pact ushered in cooperation between the Congress and the League and provided a stronger platform to launch united campaign against the British. Leaders belonging to different religious faith started visiting temples and mosques showing the virtues of communal harmony. J.C. Smith, the Collector and magistrate of Azamgarh in UP which witnessed communal rioting earlier, wrote

in 1917, 'The district of Azamgarh is to be congratulated on the fact that the Dasehra and Muharram ceremonies passed off without disturbances of any kind. For more three years past the government have been anxious regarding this matter and it is highly creditable to the people that at so critical a period there has been no sign of hostility between the different communities.'

The Congress-League alliance inspired younger Muslims to join the Congress-led nationalist movement and many of them were in the forefront of the nationalist agitations. What is important to note that during the period of the First World War national movement in India succeeded in bringing the divergent opinions and groups within India to put a united challenge to the British government. The Home Rule movement which gave momentum to national movement got further strength with the unity between the Congress and the League after the Lucknow Pact. In this context responding to the criticism leveling against the Congress for acceding to the demands of the League Tilak said,

'It has been said, gentlemen, by some that we Hindus have yielded too much to our Mohammedan brethren. I am sure I represent the sense of the Hindu community all over India when I say that we could not have yielded too much….When we have to fight against a third party, it is a very important thing that we stand on this platform united, united in race, united in religion, as regard all different shades of political creed'.

The historians have various opinions regarding the impact of the Lucknow Pact. Hugh F. Owen in an article has made the following observation:

'…The Pact did provide a basis for this new cooperation by removing one very important area of public dissension between Congressmen, Hindus and others, and the Muslim League. Members of both organisations – those who believed in a secular state, Hindus in the United Provinces and the other Hindu-majority provinces, and Muslims in the United Provinces, Bengal and the Panjab – had agreed to make sacrifices in varying degrees, for the sake of cooperation for nationalist goals, and so had helped to create an atmosphere of mutual trust in which Hindus and Muslims could combine in the Rowlatt and the Khilafat agitations…The Pact constituted a statesmanlike attempt by most of the leading Indian politicians of the day to grapple with a problem involving the fears of a large number of Muslims, as well as various Indians' views of the very nature of the India they wished to build. It was an attempt marked by willingness on the part of the participants to compromise and even to sacrifice their interests or principles in the short run for the sake of working in a united fashion for the larger goal of self-government.' (Hugh F. Owen, *Negotiating the Lucknow Pact, The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 31, No. 3, May, 1972).*

Mushirul Hasan agrees that the Pact marked the beginning of co-operation on major political and constitutional issues between the Congress and the League. However he makes the point that:

'By negotiating the Lucknow Pact on the questionable terms of communal representation, the Congress legitimised what were later derided as "separatist" and "communal" demands. By allowing itself to be dictated by narrow regional and sectarian causes, the Congress created a space within which such concerns had to be accommodated even at the risk of destroying the democratic and secular

structures it was striving to build. Instead of curbing divisive tendencies through a concerted ideological campaign, the Congress settled for hastily concluded agreements for immediate political benefits.' (Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930).*

In the assessment of Francis Robinson after the Lucknow Pact the Muslim League was overshadowed by the All India Khilafat organisation and Hindus began to play a much bigger part in Muslim affairs and Muslims began to play a greater part in the affairs of the Congress.

One may agree or disagree with these observations, but keeping in view the polarisation in Indian politics following the foundation of the Muslim League the Congress move in joining hands with the League definitely strengthened the anti-British political movement. If the central focus of the national movement was to strive for self-government then strategically negotiation with the Muslim League even accepting its demand for separate electorate helped in promoting the desired unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Pact aimed at removing the fears about majority domination from the minds of Muslims. At the same time it is felt that submission to the League's separatist agenda was a move without thinking of its future consequences. The pressure of united stand taken by the Congress and the Muslim League was felt by the British and to tame the rising wave of nationalist challenge the British government announced a fresh round of reform measures promising gradual development of self-governing institutions.

9.5 SUMMARY

In this Unit we began our discussion with the impact of the First World War on India. Being part of the British Empire India's manpower as well as material resources were used by the British in the war efforts. Economic hardship that majority of Indians had to face because of the war created discontent among common people and the leadership of the national movement found an opportunity to press for self-government in exchange of India's support in the hour of British need. B. G. Tilak and Annie Besant through their respective organisational and support base decided to launch Home Rule Leagues in support of the demand for self-government. The Home Rule movement succeeded in broadening the mass base of the Congress movement. This was also the time when the Congress and the Muslim League felt the need to join hands on certain common demands for a united opposition to the British rule. All these developments in national politics during the war period definitely prepared the ground for a more broad based movement and also succeeded in getting some new concessions in the form of the Reforms Act of 1919.

9.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the impact of the First World War on India.

2) Write a note on the Home Rule Leagues.

3) What was the Lucknow Pact? Discuss its significance.

UNIT 10 EMERGENCE OF GANDHI*

Structure

10.1 Introduction
10.2 Gandhi and His Political Experiment in South Africa
10.3 Gandhi's Political Philosophy
10.4 Champaran Satyagraha
10.5 Kheda Satyagraha
10.6 Ahmedabad Satyagraha
10.7 Significance
10.8 Summary
10.9 Exercises

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics marked the beginning of a new phase in the Indian national movement and this phase is described as the era of mass mobilisation. Before Gandhi's entry into Indian politics in 1915, and from 1893 to 1914, he was in South Africa where the racial arrogance shown by the colonial rulers and the exploitation of the local people made Gandhi to think seriously of taking up the battle against colonialism. In the course of his struggle in South Africa he developed his political philosophy based on non-violence and Satyagraha to give new direction to mass movement. His knowledge of India's rich cultural tradition and religious ideas and his reading of western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau largely shaped his political ideas. Moving ahead from the early nationalist leaders Gandhi gave new meaning to nationalist politics through mass mobilisation. In this Unit, we will explain to you Gandhi's struggle in South Africa and the development of his political ideology. Then we will discuss Gandhi's intervention in the movements of peasants and workers at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. These three movements brought Gandhi closer to Indian national politics.

10.2 GANDHI AND HIS POLITICAL EXPERIMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

'Truly speaking, it was after I went to South Africa that I became what I am now.' These words of Gandhi are of immense importance to understand his political philosophy and contribution to the Indian national movement. Gandhi was in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 and in between for brief interludes he came to India. In the course of his stay in South Africa he provided effective leadership to local Indians to fight against racial discrimination. It was in South Africa that he developed his philosophy of passive resistance and civil disobedience which was popularised later on as Satyagraha as an effective means of political mobilisation. After completing his degree in law from England, Gandhi reached Durban in 1893 as a young attorney to work for an Indian firm as a legal

* Resource Person – Prof. Swaraj Basu

adviser to Indians living and working in South Africa. On his way to South Africa his painful personal experience of racial arrogance by the whites familiarised him with humiliations and sufferings that Indians were facing in South Africa.

Indians in South Africa at that time were primarily engaged in trading and many lacked not only education but also political sophistication. Gandhi tried to activate their political consciousness and to mobilise them for their rights and justice. Gandhi was instrumental in establishing the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. For creating public opinion in support of their grievances, he started a newspaper—the *Indian Opinion*. Through regular comments in the *Indian Opinion* and by drafting petitions to the Governments of Natal, India, and Britain Gandhi tried to create pressure on the local government against any form of discrimination. He represented the Indian merchants who questioned the applicability of Transvaal Law No. 3 of 1885 which restricted where they could trade and reside, and gave a petition to the Colonial Secretary signed by over 1,000 Indians. While visiting India in 1896 Gandhi was called back to South Africa to deal with a fresh problem of discriminatory legislation by the Natal Parliament which aimed at disfranchising Indians. When Gandhi returned to Durban in 1896 after a short visit to India, he decided to make a new experiment by moving away from urban comfort and settled at a communal settlement at Phoenix, north of Durban. In South Africa, Gandhi's reading of the writings of Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Henry David Thoreau shaped his ideas on non-violent and civil disobedience movement. In 1906, the Transvaal government promulgated a new Act compelling registration of the colony's Indian population. Gandhi presiding over a mass protest meeting held in Johannesburg in that year adopted his new methodology of protest, Satyagraha, for the first time. He appealed to the gathered protesters to defy the new law and suffer the punishments for doing so, rather than going for any violent protest. The struggle continued for years and thousands of Indians, including Gandhi, were jailed. But still people refused to register. The public outcry finally forced South African General Jan Christiaan Smuts to negotiate a compromise with Gandhi and the government conceded to some of the demands. Gandhi's ideas of mass mobilisation, peaceful protest and the concept of Satyagraha matured during his struggle in South Africa and gave him the required confidence to provide leadership to the Indian national struggle. In the following section we will explain to you the political ideas of Gandhi and how he succeeded in integrating diverse sources in developing his political philosophy.

10.3 GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

'Hind Swaraj', written by Gandhi in Gujarati in 1909, was proscribed by the Government of Bombay and then in 1910 it was published in an English translation in Johannesburg. The text written in the form of a dialogue gives a fair idea of Gandhi's political thought. Gandhi introduced the book in the following words: 'In my opinion it is a book which can be put into the hands of a child. It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force'.

In this book Gandhi held modern civilisation responsible for the growing urge for luxury and consumption resulting in inequality and poverty in society. Other issues addressed in 'Hind Swaraj' are the meaning of Swaraj, non-violent means

of achieving it, Satyagraha, importance of spirituality, etc. Passive resistance, which was used by Gandhi later on as the major weapon of his political movement, was explained by him in this text in the following words:

'Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence, I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self'.

Elaborating on non-violence Gandhi wrote: 'Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under the law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul.'

Political ideas of Gandhi which one gets to know after reading this text were influenced both by Indian cultural tradition in which he was born and brought up and his readings of Western thinkers. He successfully integrated all diverse views in his philosophy to fight for India's freedom and to make India self-reliant. A. L. Basham in an essay, 'Traditional Influences on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi' has observed that the Western ideas mainly sharpened Gandhi's concepts which he derived from Indian tradition. Explaining the three dominant concepts of Gandhian ideology, 'Truth', 'Ahimsa' and 'Satyagraha', Basham argues that classical Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Bhakti movement stimulated Gandhi to make truth, ahimsa and Satyagraha as cardinal principles of his ideology. Basham concludes, 'several of Gandhi's concepts are fully in keeping with Indian tradition, and were probably developed from ideas which he absorbed in his childhood and youth, fertilized and brought to fruition by his contact with the West'. In his opinion compared to early Indian reformers greatness of Gandhian ideology lies in his skill of 'harmonizing non-Indian ideas with the Hindu dharma, and giving them a thoroughly Indian character.'

Gandhi himself acknowledged the influences on his ideas of Western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin. Gandhi read a number of other nineteenth century thinkers of Western civilisation which include Thomas Carlyle, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Sherard. A list of such works forms appendix of 'Hind Swaraj'. Tolstoy's book 'Kingdom of God is Within You' and Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' introduced him to the new meanings of society, state and politics. Being influenced by the teachings of Jesus in 'The Sermon on the Mount', Leo Tolstoy advocated for the acceptance of love as the core value of human life and rejected all forms and institutions of violence. He considered the State as the embodiment of coercion and force and stressed the value of peaceful resistance. Acknowledging the transformation brought by Tolstoy's book Gandhi wrote: 'It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt that I came across his book, 'The Kingdom of God is Within You', and was deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a firm believer in ahimsa.' Tolstoy's view on society and the State had influenced Gandhi in deciding

his course of action in political movements in India. After reading Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' in his long train journey in South Africa in 1904 Gandhi wrote, 'It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty four hours' journey. The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.' Ruskin's idea made Gandhi to think about community living and commitment to work by self which motivated him to set up his first Ashram—the Phoenix Settlement—for community living. Gandhi translated this book by Ruskin into Gujarati and titled it 'Sarvodaya'. Gandhi was impressed by the doctrine of social organisation that Ruskin defended in his book and his passion for justice. There was also condemnation of a competitive social order and unjust economic system. Henry David Thoreau's book 'Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience' advanced irrefutable arguments against the capacity of organised government for producing evil in man and society. He argued for civil disobedience to resist the wrong laws of the State. Gandhi found in Thoreau and his writings his own belief in the virtue of passive resistance. It may not be possible to determine the exact role of Thoreau in the evolution of the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha because in a letter on September 10, 1935 Gandhi wrote, 'The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. But the movement was then known as passive resistance. As it was incomplete I had coined the word Satyagraha.... When I saw the title of Thoreau's great essay, I began to use his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even "Civil Disobedience" failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I therefore adopted the phrase Civil Resistance'.

The point needs to be noted is that the concepts of truth, Ahimsa, Satyagraha which are synonymous with Gandhian political movements in India are rooted in Indian cultural tradition as well as his acquaintance with the intellectual tradition of the West. Gandhi tried to synthesize the diverse ideas keeping in view the necessity of developing a broad based national movement in India. His technique was based upon certain principles which were not used in political movement earlier. Gandhi was well aware of criticism about contradictions in his ideas and his reply was, 'In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things.... I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly ... when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.' To face the challenges of oppression, violence and injustice created by the colonial rule, Gandhi appealed for a movement based on selflessness, courage and moral force to establish a new political order. Gandhian method of civil resistance assumed significant importance in India's struggle against colonialism and Satyagraha became an effective means to voice political as well as social protest. Commenting on Gandhian politics Judith Brown has observed that 'His ideal of service to those in need made it likely that he would only participate in politics when he felt that by so doing he could right 'wrongs' which people were suffering; but he, if any one, had the potential for reaching out to those beyond the political camp, to make the new style of institutional politics burst out of its early limitations, and to create a large political nation. What was more, in Satyagraha he had a technique ideally suited to work among those who were unaccustomed to institutional politics.' The context and complexities in

which Gandhi tried to forge unity among Indians to challenge the colonial rule, his concern for common people and efforts to bring masses in the mainstream national politics marked the beginning of a new phase of national movement. In the following section we will discuss that after coming back to India from South Africa in 1915 how Gandhi engaged himself in the struggle of peasants and workers against exploitation and created a space for himself to give new direction to the Indian national movement.

10.4 CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA

Gandhi's success in his movement against racial discrimination in South Africa made him famous in India as a leader who fought for the common people against the colonial rule. After coming back from South Africa, he initially decided to set up a base in Gujarat and to work for the welfare of people. National movement in India at that juncture was divided into two groups, Moderates and Extremists, and there were also people who believed in revolutionary actions to fight for freedom. There were also some people within Muslims who formed the Muslim League to work for the interests of Muslims alone. Given this background Gandhi tried to develop a political base by interacting with cross section of people. Politics of the Moderates or the Extremists could not convince Gandhi for achieving Swaraj nor did he have any conviction in the politics of violence. His belief after his successful political movement in South Africa in the strength of Satyagraha encouraged him to wait for suitable opportunity to launch Satyagraha in India. The movement of peasants at Champaran in Bihar against indigo planters in 1917 provided Gandhi that desired opportunity.

Champaran was in North Bihar having large villages and two major towns—Motihari and Bettiah. Being covered by the permanent settlement of 1793 three proprietors—Bettiah, Ramnagar and Madhuban Estates—controlled most of the lands of the district but the landlords instead of directly managing the lands leased out lands to temporary tenure-holders. The European tenure-holders got hold of a sizeable section of cultivable lands and because of big profit they started cultivating indigo. The European planters cultivated the lands either directly or through peasant tenants but the tenants were the worst victims of the planter raj. In 1917 with the declining demand of indigo in the world market the pressure on the tenants increased and made them the worst victims of the slump in market. An official report of the period states that 'Everything the cultivator had to sell, rice, oil-seeds or gur, had either fallen or at least not risen in price, while everything he had to buy, cloths, salt, kerosene, had become extremely expensive'. Besides the general economic hardship of the tenants, the 'tinkathia' system caused immediate unrest among the cultivators. The name 'tinkathia' came from the arrangement in which three kathas per bigha of a peasant land holding was fixed for cultivation of indigo. Planters also insisted that in best cultivable lands indigo should be cultivated so that the production of crop is more. The price paid to the ryots was fixed based on the area of land not on the volume of crop production. This was the reason for pressurising the cultivators to cultivate indigo in good lands to get maximum crop. The cultivators also faced other forms of economic and social exploitation which made them agitated against the existing planter raj. The situation in Champaran was not much different from other parts of India where cultivators were facing various forms of exploitation. But it was Gandhi's intervention and leadership which made Champaran movement exceptional.

On the invitation of local Congress leader Raj Kumar Shukla, Gandhi came to Champaran in 1917 to have first hand experience of the plight of Champaran peasants. Local administration was aware of Gandhi's concern for the abolition of indentured labour and was not comfortable with Gandhi's presence in Champaran. After meeting the commissioner of the division Gandhi expressed his intention to look into the grievances of indigo cultivators as reported by local people. But the commissioner was of the opinion that Gandhi may provoke disturbances and wrote to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, asking permission to extern Gandhi on grounds of public safety under the Defence of India Rules. Gandhi was asked by the district magistrate of Champaran to quit Champaran as his presence might create a problem for public peace. Government action to Gandhi's presence in Champaran evoked protest from the Indian press and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote, 'So Mr. Gandhi has gained his point. The part which he has played in this sensational matter is no less important than what he did when he started his passive resistance campaign in South Africa. There he braved jail and the displeasure of the authorities in the cause of suffering humanity; here also he did the same.' Gandhi's simplicity and ability to reach common people in their language and his visit to the villages virtually made him the saviour in the eyes of masses. Gandhi demanded an enquiry by the government of the grievances of cultivators and asked the government to stop illegal exactions from cultivators. The Bihar government, under the pressure from the central government and much against its wish, agreed to appoint a commission which included Gandhi to look into the condition of Champaran peasants. The central government explained the rational for agreeing to Gandhi's demand in a letter to the Bihar government: 'In appointing a Commission, to use your phrase, we are "heading off" Gandhi, but in doing so we avoid giving the appearance of shirking our responsibilities. We feel that it is more expedient to head him off than to lay him by the heels and thus give a handle to the suggestion that we are burking the whole enquiry'. Whatever be the logic behind the government action as a result of the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the government and the recommendations of this Enquiry Committee the Champaran Agrarian Act was made in 1917. The Act abolished the 'tinkathia' system and also partly addressed the grievances of the tenants. Although neither the planters nor the tenants were happy with this arrangement but definitely by his intervention Gandhi succeeded in making the struggle of Champaran peasants the first successful experiment of Satyagraha in Indian political movement.

Analysing Gandhi's style of leadership in Champaran movement Judith Brown has observed that 'Leaving aside the recognised politicians, he went into the villages dressed in the sort of clothes villagers wore, speaking the vernacular, espousing causes which concerned his rustic audience: while doing so he drew in the local business and educated men who had had little interest or influence in the Congress style of politics. He acted as go-between for these different groups, mediating between two tiers of public life, and in return secured a powerful provincial following. He succeeded where earlier politicians had failed or had not even attempted to mobilise support.' In the course of Champaran movement a group of local intelligentsia like Rajendra Prasad, Rajkumar Shukla, J. B. Kripalani, Indulal Yajnik, etc. came in close contact with Gandhi and worked as his emissaries among masses in organising movement. Till Champaran people in India knew Gandhi for his heroic struggle in South Africa and Gandhi

maintained a distance from the Congress-led national movement. Gandhi's participation in the movement of Champaran peasants and whatever success he achieved in compelling the government to redress the grievances of peasants created an image of Gandhi's leadership quality across different groups and different regions. The Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918 which was the immediate outcome of the movement brought some respite for the peasants and put certain restrictions on the planters.

10.5 KHEDA SATYAGRAHA

When Gandhi was engaged in leading the movement of peasants in Champaran, in his home state, Gujarat, peasants of Kheda mobilised themselves demanding revenue relief from the government. Hardship of the peasants was caused by crop failure and rise in prices. When the peasants were in debt trap the government was not ready to relieve them from revenue burden. The condition of peasants narrated by a peasant of Kheda in 1918 was as follows:

'The scourge of plague is upon us. Bajri which was sold at Rs.2 a maund in Sanvat 1916 (this should be A.D. 1916) is now selling at Rs.3 and ¼ a maund. Rice is at Rs.4 to 6 a maund. And under the law we may not keep Mowhra flowers. What shall the poor eat as they are thus placed and wherefrom shall they procure the money they pay you with? The prices of iron having gone up our plough shares and our implements have become very dear. Things that cost two or three rupees before are costing Rs.12 today. Labour also has become very expensive.'

In 1918 Gujarat suffered a lot because of severe plague and in Kheda alone the number of death was 16,740. Although there was a perception that the sympathizers of the Home Rule movement and the members of the Gujarat Sabha were behind the instigation of Kheda peasants but Gandhi made it clear in a public meeting in Bombay in 1918 that outsiders had no role in starting the agitation at Kheda. He said:

'This struggle was not started by outsiders. Nobody instigated the Kheda public to launch it. There is no political motive behind it. It did not originate with the Home Rulers or with any barristers or lawyers as some people allege…. It was started by the tillers themselves. After the political Conference at Godhra, some agriculturists in Kheda decided to request the Government for relief in view of the excessive rains. They wrote to me, informing me that they were legally entitled to relief and asking me whether I could help'.

Let us see how the movement started at Kheda and what Gandhi's intervention was. Mohanlal Kameshwar Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh, two local leaders of Kheda, seeing the discontent of local peasants, made appeal to the Bombay government not to force the peasants to pay revenues. They also sought help from outside leaders, particularly from the members of the Gujarat Sabha in Ahmedabad, in favour of the peasants. They also sent telegram to Gandhi for help who at that time was in Champaran. Gandhi advised them to be firm on their demands but could not personally come. The Gujarat Sabha in which Gandhi was president urged the Bombay government for exemption in some cases and also postponement of revenue demands. But not getting favourable response the Sabha asked the peasants not to pay land revenues. The government on its part

after an enquiry found no justification for suspension of revenues. Local press gave publicity to peasant discontent and their agitation for suspension of revenue demands. Gandhi reached Bombay on February 1918 and decided to make an inquiry personally of the hardship of peasants. Gandhi along with other members of the Gujarat Sabha visited the villages in Kheda and found justification in peasants demand for suspension of revenues. Getting no assurance from the government on the demands of peasants Gandhi decided at a meeting of the Gujarat Sabha to resort to Satyagraha. In a meeting at Nadiad on 22 March 1918 Gandhi urged the volunteers to take a sacred pledge which was as follows:

'We the undersigned…solemnly declare that we shall not pay the assessment for the year whether it be wholly or in part; we shall leave it to the Government to take any legal steps they choose to enforce recovery of the same and we shall undergo all the sufferings that this may involve. We shall also allow our lands to be confiscated should they do so. But we shall not by voluntary payment allow ourselves to be regarded as liars and thus lose our self-respect'.

Gandhi personally toured villages of Kheda and encouraged Satyagrahis to stand by the pledge. Pandya and other local leaders were arrested for defying the government but they aroused lot of local support. Government was confident that Gandhi would not resort to violence by giving his professed faith in passive resistance. Government was also equally concerned for the needed support of Indians in the British war effort. Therefore the government ordered its local officials to be restrained in collection of revenues and not to confiscate lands. Gandhi decided to call off the Satyagraha without getting much concrete assurance from the government. It is viewed by some that Gandhi was not very happy with the developments in Kheda and there were also reports of violence in some areas disobeying Gandhi's appeal to passive resistance. Judith Brown has commented that in Gandhi's assessment 'this satyagraha gave him no happiness, and lacked the essentials of a complete satyagraha triumph, since it did not leave the satyagrahis "stronger and more spirited" than they were before'. Gandhi's assessment may not be completely true as one finds that this Satyagraha created 'a place for him in the ranks of the politicians'. Satyagraha in Kheda failed in achieving its objectives but the effectiveness of Satyagraha was proved. Judith Brown has observed that 'Kaira (Kheda) hammered home the lesson of Champaran that satyagraha could be used in virtually any situation of conflict, by literate and illiterate. It was a weapon for all seasons, and in Gandhi's hands, directed by his personal ideology, it gave him the edge over conventional politicians with their techniques of petitions, public speeches and debates, which were more suitable for the educated'. David Hardiman has argued that neither peasants nor the government gained visible victory from Kheda Satyagraha. But 'the real victory lay with Gandhi who had built for himself a powerful political base in the villages of Kheda district'. In future course of nationalist movement villages of Kheda became the strong support base of the nationalist movement.

10.6 AHMEDABAD SATYAGRAHA

In 1918 Gandhi organised another Satyagraha movement in Ahmedabad in support of mill workers. Ahmedabad was known for its textile industry and the textile mills in Ahmedabad witnessed steady growth in cloth production from 250 million yards in 1913-14 to 392 million yards in 1916-17 although the production declined in 1918-19. Labour was in demand to keep pace with rise in production. But the

outbreak of plague in Ahmedabad in 1917 forced many labours to leave Ahmedabad to save them from plague. The mill owners in order to retain workers paid bonus to them as high as 75% of their pay. But when the threat of plague was over, the mill owners decided to stop the plague bonus from February 1918. This created resentment among workers who were facing hardship because of rise in prices caused by the war. Gandhi was approached by one of the secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha about the discontent among Ahmedabad mill workers. Ambalal Sarabhai who was one of the owners of textile mills in Ahmedabad was known to Gandhi. Gandhi requested to Ambalal for enhancement of wages and decided to help in finding solution to workers problems. Presiding a meeting of workers Gandhi argued for amicable solution of workers grievances. Gandhi represented the workers in a board of arbitration formed by the local government. However many workers, defying the arbitration process, went for strike and the owners on their part declared lockout. Gandhi on his part after a careful study of the situation suggested for a reasonable increase of wages and prepared a pledge to be signed by the Satyagrahis. Through leaflets written during this period Gandhi wanted to educate the Satyagrahis about the principles of Satyagraha. Coming under the pressure of the mill owners when some workers started to join the mills Gandhi announced his decision of fasting to create moral pressure. What prompted the mill owners to settlement has different interpretations but a settlement was made in which 35% increase in wages was agreed. Fasting was conceived as a means of self-suffering to create moral pressure over the opponent and this was Gandhi's first use of fasting as a political weapon in India. Gandhi's intervention in Kheda and Ahmedabad in support of the demands of peasants and workers helped him in creating a political base in rural and urban areas of Gujarat. Judith Brown has observed that 'As Kaira (Kheda) drew Gandhi into the villages and fields of Gujarat, so Ahmedabad drew him into the towns and factories, distinguishing him even more clearly from the older political leaders in the scope of his interests and the character of his following.'

10.7 SIGNIFICANCE

Issues in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were different. The social and political context was also different. But in all three places Gandhi made use of Satyagraha as the mode of political mobilisation. Political climate in India at that time was definitely conducive for an effective political mobilisation against the British rule due to the Home Rule movement and the Lucknow Pact. But still a broader political mobilisation involving people of different interests was not visible. The movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were organized around local issues but Gandhi's intervention paved the ground for bringing masses into broader political movement. Gandhi's charisma no doubt helped in acceptance of his leadership by the local people for their movement against oppression, but Gandhi also brought with him a new language of protest. Rejecting violence as a form of protest and focusing on passive resistance, and moral force rather than physical force, as his political weapon Gandhi succeeded in giving a new direction to political mobilisation. There are different interpretations of Gandhi's leadership in the movements at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. Judith Brown has made the following observation:

'He worked in two regions notoriously backward according to the standards of the political leaders, and attracted large followings precisely because he took up issues which were outside their range of interests, and provided his adherents

with a technique of action appropriate to their needs but which the politicians feared to use. Though much has been made of Gandhi's charismatic appeal, it becomes clear that in Gujarat and Bihar his public image was no simple or single one. He appealed to different groups for different reasons and different ways, and the pattern of his leadership was far more complicated than the manipulation of an adulatory audience. In certain areas where he was personally known, his appeal to the lowest groups in society was temporarily charismatic, as he became virtually a local messiah; but for his real work he relied on small groups of influential local men whom he educated to be his "subcontractors" in rallying support and organising his campaigns. Such men followed him for a variety of reasons – personal attraction, religious conviction, the prospect of economic gain or increased local prestige, or for lack of any one else.'

Jacques Pouchepadass in his book 'Champaran and Gandhi' has argued that peasants were more active in mobilisation and actions against the plantations in different villages rather than the elite leadership as shown in most of the narratives of Gandhian movement in Champaran. Gandhi's simplicity, determination and civil disobedience along with various rumours about Gandhi's ability to negotiate with the government officials attracted masses towards Gandhi for redressing their grievances. Local leaders used Gandhi's name to mobilize peasants even without the knowledge of Gandhi. Gandhi appealed to the peasants not to resort to violence and made it clear that solution to their problem would come from the government and not from him. But Gandhi's moderating influence failed to restrain the masses from violence where Gandhi was not present. In the opinion of Jacques Pouchepadass there were numerous violent agitations which were directly influenced by Gandhi's campaign in Champaran but Gandhi had practically no control over such mass actions.

Disagreeing with Judith Brown's assumption that "subcontractors" played important role in mobilising peasants Sumit Sarkar has argued that 'the Gujarat peasants had a mind of their own', and they were not simply responding to Gandhi's men. Referring to Gandhi's intervention in Ahmedabad textile workers' movement, Sarkar is of the opinion that Gandhi's approach of peaceful arbitration of disputes between owners and workers was successful in Ahmedabad because of his personal contacts with Ahmedabad mill owners and workers. But 'this Gandhian model, which rejected not only politicisation along "class-war" line but also militant economic struggles, never spread beyond Ahmedabad.'

A close look at the movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad suggests that in each place local people first raised voice against exploitation and also initiated mobilisation. The intervention of Gandhi came later on after getting invitation from the local leadership. Image of Gandhi as a leader was not yet much known but his successful movement in South Africa created an image of him as a leader who can confront enemies and fight for justice. His intervention not only provided direction to the movements already started by the masses but Gandhian non-violence provided an effective and legitimate form of movement which was still unknown. In the course of these three movements Gandhi was able to influence local educated youths like Rajendra Prasad, J. B. Kripalani in Bihar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik in Gujarat who later on played significant role in nationalist politics. Gandhi had not yet decided about his future course of association with nationalist politics, but these movements definitely laid the ground for Gandhi's greater role as a national leader.

10.8 SUMMARY

This Unit introduces you to emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics. We began our discussion by referring to Gandhi's role in organising protest and leading the movement in South Africa against racial discrimination. His experiment with non-violence and Satyagraha as political weapon in the course of his movement in South Africa was unheard of in political protest. We have explained how his knowledge of Indian cultural tradition and his readings of Western thinkers shaped his political philosophy. He had the ability to integrate diverse ideas depending upon the context and the need. We have also explained that the movements started by peasants and workers in Bihar and Gujarat on local issues, got Gandhi's support later on, and through the method of Satyagraha he tried to redress the grievances of peasants and workers. Whatever success he achieved for the local masses through the movements at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad, these movements raised lot of hopes in Gandhi's leadership and soon he emerged as the leader of the Indian national movement.

10.9 EXERCISES

1) What was the significance of the South African experience in formulation of Gandhi's political philosophy?

2) Discuss the differences in the social and political conditions in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad.

3) Discuss the various views on the significance of Gandhian movements before the Non-cooperation movement.

UNIT 11 THE TURNING POINT*

Structure

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Background of the Rowlatt Satyagraha

11.3 Organisation of the Satyagraha

11.4 Regional Spread of the Satyagraha

11.5 Importance of the Satyagraha

11.6 Summary

11.7 Exercises

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit we have discussed the emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics with reference to his contributions to the peasants' and workers' movements at Champaran in Bihar and Kheda and Ahmedabad in Gujarat. Next important event towards the growth of national movement in India and the leadership role played by Gandhi was the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919. The enactment of the Rowlatt Act in 1919 by the British government empowering the state with arbitrary powers to suppress voices against the British government evoked sharp reactions from Indian people. Gandhi's experience in South Africa of fighting against the government by using the technique of Satyagraha encouraged him to give a call for Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. We will explain in this unit the background of launching the Rowlatt Satyagraha, and how in different provinces people belonging to different classes, castes and communities responded to Gandhi's call, and the violence that broke out following the movement in some parts of India. Gandhi withdrew the movement because of violence and the movement failed to repeal the Rowlatt Act. Still the Rowlatt Satyagraha through its mass mobilisation marked the beginning of a new phase in Indian national movement and Gandhi took the centre stage of national politics.

11.2 BACKGROUND OF THE ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA

In the previous Unit we have explained to you the Gandhian concept of Satyagraha and how Gandhi used the method of Satyagraha and non-violent protest to redress the local grievances. Gandhi's leadership to the movements of peasants and workers in Bihar and Ahmedabad paved the way for his larger role in Indian national movement. Following the repressive Rowlatt Act passed by the British government in India Gandhi launched his first all India mass Satyagraha in March 1919. In this section we will discuss the developments which culminated in the passing of the objectionable Rowlatt legislation and the consequent nation-wide Satyagraha movement launched under the leadership of Gandhi. In India practically every class had grievances against the British rule and they were hoping that after the end of the First World War the British government would bring

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major administrative reforms to meet the expectations of Indian people. However the reform initiated by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919 was of very limited nature and therefore the leadership of the nationalist movement was critical of this reform. This was also the time when India witnessed the outbreak of revolutionary activities particularly in Bengal, Maharashtra and the Punjab to fight for freedom of India through violent means. The British government on its part along with the path of limited reform wanted to suppress any activities by Indians which in their opinion are against the interest of the British government in India. During the course of the First World War the British government took recourse to extraordinary powers to deal with the 'revolutionary' activities. Once the War was over they appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sidney Rowlatt to suggest legislative measures to curb revolutionary activities in India. On the recommendation of the Rowlatt committee the Government in India prepared two draft bills to enable the government to check anti-state activities and to empower the government with discretionary power to deal with political crime. In spite of the unanimous opposition by Indian members in the Imperial Legislative Council the government pushed through the legislation. It is also believed that through the Rowlatt Act the government in India wanted to assure those in Britain who felt that the reform proposals of Montagu would affect the British interests in India. The Rowlatt Act authorised the government to bring in amendment in the Indian Penal Code to ensure the security of the state and to short-circuit 'the processes of law in dealing with revolutionary crime'. Gandhi was very much opposed to such repressive act and considered this an open challenge by the British government to Indian people. In a letter to V. S. Srinivasa Shastri (the liberal leader) Gandhi wrote, 'If we succumb we are done for. If we may prove our word that the government will see an agitation such that they never witnessed before, we shall have proved our capacity for resistance to autocracy or tyrannical rule….For myself if the Bills were to be proceeded with, I feel that I can no longer render peaceful obedience to the laws of a power that is capable of such a devilish legislation as these two Bills, and I would not hesitate to invite those who think with me to join me in the struggle'. (9 February, 1919, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* Vol. XV). Gandhi believed that the Rowlatt legislation was very much against people's democratic right and the constitutional reforms appear to be a mockery. He understood the prevailing social discontents and the political situation in India correctly. Gandhi communicated his decision to the government of India to defy the new law and also signed a pledge along with his disciples to disobey the Rowlatt Act. Then Gandhi addressed an open letter to 'the People of India' urging them to join the Satyagraha launched against the Rowlatt Act. There was already growing Indian political opinion reflected through the Home Rule movement and the efforts made through the Lucknow Pact for united opposition against the British rule. But it was Gandhi who brought new techniques of mass protest through Satyagraha and non-violent method. Gandhi urged upon the followers of politics of prayer and petition that 'the growing generation will not be satisfied with petitions….Satyagraha is the only way'.

11.3 ORGANISATION OF THE SATYAGRAHA

Ravinder Kumar has observed that 'The launching of the Rowlatt Satyagraha was an act of faith rather than an act of calculation, for although Gandhi had a

firm belief in the righteousness of his cause, he had no idea how the people of India would respond to his initiative.' ('Introduction', *Essays on Gandhian Politics*). By 1919 Gandhi had developed contact with prominent Indian leaders, addressed different sections of Indian people in different parts of the country and also provided leadership to peasants and workers movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. But he still did not have control over Indian National Congress or any political organisation to have the support for organising all India movement. Despite this limitation Gandhi's decision to launch the first countrywide Satyagraha against the British government, in the opinion of Ravinder Kumar, 'transformed nationalism in India from a movement representing the classes to a movement representing the masses'. This movement also brought Gandhi in the centre of Indian national movement. The two Home Rule Leagues organised by Mrs. Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the associations of Indian Muslims provided Gandhi with the needed support base. He also organised his own organisation, the Satyagraha Sabha, for carrying out the movement. The end of the First World War created a sense of urgency among young Indians that Britain must fulfill the war time promises but they were not happy with the proposed Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. Whereas Indian Muslims were concerned about the fate of the Khilafat and were critical of Britain, Gandhi from his political experience in South Africa very tactfully tried to use this anti-British sentiment. Members of the Home Rule Leagues held protest meetings against the Rowlatt Bills in different cities in India. Bombay being very active in the Home Rule movement members of Bombay Home Rule movement first approached Gandhi when he was in Bombay in February 1919 on the Rowlatt Bills. It was the Bombay Home Rulers who through posters and leaflets made people aware of the Rowlatt Bills and publicised Gandhi's pledge against the Bills. Important newspapers like Young India, the Bombay bi-weekly, *Navajivan*, the *Gujarati weekly of Ahmedabad*, the *Bombay Chronicle*, the *Independent* of Allahabad, the *Muslim Akhuwat* of Lucknow, the *Waqt* of Amritsar, etc. played important role in mobilizing public opinion against the Bills. Gandhi by forming the Satyagraha Sabha in Bombay took a definite organisational step to carry forward the movement. This was followed by formation of Satyagraha committees in Delhi, Allahabad, Gujarat and other places. The Sabhas were responsible to mobilise participants, to educate people about Satyagraha and non-violence and to explain the Rowlatt Bills. Much of the effectiveness of the Satyagraha campaign depended on Gandhi's personal visit to different cities and the initiatives of local leaders. Rajendra Prasad, J.B. Kripalani, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Jawaharlal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr. M. A. Ansari, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlu, Dr. Satyapal, Swami Shraddhananda, Hasan Imam, etc. committed themselves to help in organising the Satyagraha movement. Gandhi in the course of this Satyagraha movement did not take formal support of the Congress organisation which was not yet prepared for mass agitational politics. He undertook tour to many parts of India to establish Satyagraha Sabhas, to mobilise mass support and to create awareness about non-violence. Before going to the next section here I like to introduce you to the speech given by Gandhi at Madras to mobilise popular support for the proposed Satyagraha. This speech clearly states his ideas on the Rowlatt Bills and the proposed Satyagraha.

Speech on Satyagraha Movement
Trichinopoly
March 25, 1919
FRIENDS,

…You know the Rowlatt Bills perhaps as much as I do. I need not explain them. You all want them to be withdrawn. The Indian councillors in the Imperial Council tried their best to have this legislation withdrawn. They failed. The Bills are bad, but this flouting of the unanimous voice of the Indian members is worse and it is for you and for me, whose representatives those councillors are, to right this double wrong. How can it be righted? When the governors of a country do a great wrong to the people whom they govern, history teaches us that they have resorted to violence, sometimes with apparent success, often they have been defeated; but violence can only result in violence, as darkness added to darkness really deepens it. The doctrine of violence is of the earth, earthy, merely material, and can be no guide for a human being who at all believes in the existence of the soul. If, as I am sure you will reject the doctrine of violence, you have to consider other means for seeking redress, and that, as I would translate, would mean *shatham prati satyam* ….

The Bills have violated the national conscience, and resistance to those commands which are in violation of one's conscience is a sacred privilege and a beauty, and it is not this law or this command of the governor that we resist, but it is our duty, it is open to us to resist all his commands which are not moral commands, and when we respectfully disobey wrongful things of these governors, we serve not only them but the whole nation. I have been asked wherever I have gone what law, what other laws, shall we disobey. The only answer I am able to give you today is that it is open to us to disobey all the laws which do not involve any moral sanction. That being so, it is totally unnecessary for you to know what laws we shall disobey. The aim of a satyagrahi is to invite upon his own devoted head all the suffering that he is capable of undertaking. Those of you, therefore, who disapprove of the Rowlatt legislation and who have faith in the efficacy of satyagraha, I have come to invite in order that you might sign this Pledge, but I will ask you to consider a thousand times before signing the Pledge. It is no discredit to you that you do not sign the Pledge, either because you do not disapprove of the legislation or you have not got the strength and the will, and it is not open to any satyagrahi to resent your refraining from signing the Pledge….

You might have seen from today's papers received here that I have addressed to the Press a letter embodying some suggestions. I will, however, repeat them this evening. My first suggestion is, that on Sunday week, i.e., 6th day of April, we shall all observe a 24 hours' fast. It is a fitting preliminary for satyagrahis before they commence civil disobedience of the laws. For all others, it will be an expression of their deep grief over the wrong committed by the Government. I have regarded this movement as a purely religious movement and fast is an ancient institution amongst us. You will not mistake it for a hunger- strike (Laughter.) nor will you consider it as designed for exerting any pressure upon the Government. It is a measure of self-discipline, it will be an expression of the anguish of the soul, and when

the soul is anguished, nobody could resist. I hope that all adults will take up the task unless they are prevented from doing so by ill-health or religious conviction. I have also suggested that on that Sunday all work should be suspended, all markets and all business places should be closed. Apart from the spiritual value of these two acts, they will form an education of first-class value for the masses. I have ventured to include in my suggestions even public servants, because I think that we have to credit them with conscience as also their independence and ability and privilege to associate themselves with wrongs which the nation may want to resent. It is right that they should not take part in political meetings and political discussions, but their individual conscience must have full and free play. My third suggestion in which public servants may not take part is that on that day, we should visit every hamlet, if we can, and hold meetings and pass resolutions asking the Secretary of State for India to veto this legislation. I would not ask you to resort to these public meetings and resolutions, but for one reason, and the reason is that behind these meetings and resolutions lies the force of satyagraha to enforce the national will. In these three suggestions, whether you are satyagrahis or not, so long as you disapprove of the Rowlatt legislation, all can join and I hope that there will be such a response throughout the length and breadth of India as would convince the Government that we are alive to what is going on in our midst….

The Hindu, 27-3-1919.
(Source: *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* Vol. XV)

Gandhi was not very sure of the success and consequences of the movement. Still he went ahead and decided to launch the movement with the nation-wide hartal (strike) on 6 April 1919. Gandhi was arrested on 9 April 1919 and there was mass agitation in different parts of India which soon took a violent turn. Although the movement was most effective in cities and larger towns but followers of Gandhi also reached out to smaller towns and rural areas. Even with very little formal organisation and much beyond of his calculation the Rowlatt Satyagraha succeeded in creating passions among masses. We will now discuss the regional spread of this Satyagraha movement.

11.4 REGIONAL SPREAD OF THE SATYAGRAHA

The Rowlatt Satyagraha proved Gandhi's leadership ability to connect with the masses irrespective of caste, class and community linkages. It was not only the skillful use of popular religious symbols by Gandhi but also his understanding of social realities and different class loyalties helped him in united them for a common political cause. Ravinder Kumar said that Gandhi 'looked upon the peoples of India as a loose constellation of classes, communities, and religious groups, and because he had no illusions about the nature of political society in the country, he was able to unite it in a way it had never been united before'. The Rowlatt Satyagraha movement is characterised as 'the biggest and most violent anti-British upsurge which India had seen since 1857'. Delhi, Lahore, Amritsar, Gujarat, etc. were the most affected areas in the course of this movement. With the transfer of capital to Delhi in 1912 political awareness also increased. Revolutionary nationalism, Pan-Islamism and the agitation of the Home Rule League kept people of Delhi politically engaged. Initiatives taken by the members of the Home Rule League and the All India Muslim League to arouse public

awareness against the various actions of the British Government along with the local press highlighting common problems created an anti-British sentiment to which various rumors about the Rowlatt Bills added further fuel. Gandhi attended a large public meeting in Delhi on 7 March in which people representing different sections of society were present. Gandhi founded the Satyagraha Sabha in Delhi which succeeded in drawing a large number of students. Analysing the Rowlatt Satyagraha movement in Delhi Donald W. Ferrell (Ferrell's article on Rowlatt Satyagraha in Delhi, See Ravinder Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics*) has written that the movement in Delhi lasted from 30 March to 18 April and the men who took part in the movement are divided into two categories—primary leaders and secondary leaders. Primary leaders were those who were recognised as political leaders and secondary leaders were those who were not much known but wanted to play an active role by voicing the concern of the underprivileged sections of the city. Swami Shradhanand who belonged to the Arya Samaj was persuaded by Gandhi to join the movement. Shradhanand played crucial role in drawing popular support in Delhi for the movement. Merchant community as well as common people observed hartal on 30 March in Delhi to protest against the Rowlatt legislation. There was spontaneous response from different quarters without much effort by the leaders of the movement. There were riots and police firing on 30 March in Delhi in the course of public gathering which was given wide publicity by the local press. Due to this incident of violence Gandhi advised volunteers in Delhi not to participate in the hartal on 6 April. Despite Gandhi's appeal there was complete hartal on 6 April in Delhi. Shradhanand and other leaders addressed a gathering of about 15,000 to 20,000 and spoke on the importance of Satyagraha. Gandhi was expected to arrive in Delhi on 9 April but he was arrested on his way to Delhi. Following this public meeting was organized in Delhi under the presidentship of Muhammad Abdul Rahman which was attended by about one lakh people. In this meeting Shradhanand introduced a resolution asking for Gandhi's release and appealed people to follow Gandhi's example of non-violence. Despite the news of Gandhi's release and the requests made by the leaders, hartal continued in Delhi till 18 April. Employees of bank and railways gave the strike call on 13 April. There was sign of more aggressiveness among people and the masses from neighbouring areas of Delhi to the violent mood. There was firing at Chandni Chowk on 17 April. The Rowlatt Satyagraha in Delhi proved that it was possible to bring heterogeneous groups in one platform provided there was unity of interests.

Lahore on the eve of the Rowlatt Satyagraha had enough reasons for disillusionment with the British government. The thinking of Islam in danger because of the British attitude towards Turkey after the First World War, the decision of reparation of Bengal, distress caused by inflationary prices, were enough to agitate the mind of people of Lahore. Gandhi's appeal to observe hartal on 6 April in protest to the Rowlatt legislation got positive support from the people of Lahore. The Provincial Congress Committee extended support to the call for Satyagraha and many prominent citizens also came forward to support the movement. The crowd comprising of different social groups gathered in large numbers and was in rebellious mood. Leaders addressed the gathering on the importance of the hartal and a resolution was passed against the Rowlatt Act. There were protests in the streets of Lahore against local government officials who tried to oppose hartal. On behalf of the government, warning was issued to citizens asking to maintain public order but the mood in the city was of defiance.

The leaders of Lahore used the festival of Ram Navmi on 9 April inviting Hindus and Muslims to join hands and a procession of about 20,000 people, Hindus and Muslims, travelled in different parts of the city. In the procession there was a visible mood of protest against the government. Rumours of Gandhi's arrest on the way to Punjab and the deportation of local leaders of Amritsar like Kitchlew and Satyapal caused strong popular resentment resulting in massive protest against the government in the city. The government on its part resorted to police firing which aggravated the crisis further. Lahore witnessed a massive gathering of about 35,000 people consisting of different religious communities and social classes protesting the government action. On the suggestion of a local leader a Popular Committee was formed to act on behalf of the citizens of Lahore. Seeing no other way the local government tried to negotiate with the People's Committee to enforce law and order in the city. But the general mood was so much against the government action that the leaders of the People's Committee failed to get support for the termination of the hartal. Seeing the popular discontent the government imposed martial law in the city and forced to withdraw the movement. Analysing the Rowlatt Satyagraha in Lahore Ravinder Kumar summed up, 'All that was required in April 1919 to launch a popular movement against the British Government was an issue which would provide a channel of expression for the discontents which affected various classes and communities in Lahore. By initiating a Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act, Gandhi provided such an issue, and he thereby set afoot a movement whose intensity surprised the local administration no less than it surprised the local leaders of Lahore'.

The worst happened in Amritsar. There was general discontent among people in the Punjab, particularly the Sikhs, because of actions of the British government and the activities and trials of the Ghadrites. On 6 April 1919 Amritsar witnessed a hartal in protest against the Rowlatt legislation. However the government action of deporting local leaders, Kitchlew and Satyapal, and the ban on Gandhi's entry to Punjab led to popular discontent. There was a protest march by local people of Amritsar against the government decision of the deportation of the two leaders. The protesters were stopped and fired upon near the railway foot-bridge. The police firing on 10 April in Amritsar was followed by attacks on government institutions by the common people. To bring the situation in control martial law was enforced by General Dyer. The city was quiet for two days and on 13 April which was the day of annual Baisakhi festival peasants from villages around Amritsar came to visit the Golden Temple. On that day a public meeting was organised in the afternoon in Jallianwala Bagh, a place near to the Golden Temple. The crowd was mostly local residents and the village peasants who were not aware that public meeting was banned in the city. General Dyer without giving any warning to the crowd in that enclosed ground opened fire and according to government estimate 379 persons were killed and 1200 were injured. On the following day martial law was clamped on several other towns of Punjab. In protest to the brutality of the British repression Rabindranath Tagore renounced the 'Knighthood' given to him by the British. Apart from Lahore and Amritsar districts of Gujranwala, Gujarat and Lyallpur in Punjab were seriously affected by the Anti-Rowlatt movement. There were attacks on government buildings and institutions to express people's anger against the government. The government on its part took recourse to force to suppress the movement.

Seeing the cruelties perpetuated at Amritsar the Congress decided to hold the next Congress annual session at Amritsar to express its solidarity with the people

of the Punjab. Paying tribute to those who were killed in Amritsar and elsewhere in the Punjab the Congress condemned the most shameful barbarities. Resolution was passed urging the government for immediate removal of General Dyer and immediate recall of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford. It was also decided to acquire the site of Jallianwalla Bagh and to build a memorial to perpetuate the memory of those who were killed.

In Ahmedabad public meeting was organised to protest against the Rowlatt legislation. Under the auspices of the Home Rule League and the Satyagraha Sabha preparations were made to observe 6 April as protest day against the Rowlatt Act. Later, following the news of Gandhi's arrest people came out in the street and workers stopped works in the mills. The police resorted to firing to control the crowd and violence spread in the city. Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik and others appealed for peace. Despite the appeal for restraint disturbances continued, government buildings were attacked, houses were looted. To control the crowd city was virtually placed under martial law. In an estimate it is suggested that about 28 were killed and 123 were wounded in the firing. Gandhi on his return to Ahmedabad on 13 April taking permission from the government organised public meeting and urged upon people to go for fast and confess their guilt. Besides Ahmedabad, the disturbances also spread to Viramgam, Kheda and other places. In United Provinces demonstrations were held in most of the large towns, shops remained closed and public transport came to a halt. Most noticeable was the unity between the Hindus and the Muslims in public gatherings. In Bihar also hartal was confined to mostly in large towns. Bombay, Calcutta, Madras also witnessed hartals but there was restraint on violence. The government report on the Rowlatt Satyagraha in the city of Calcutta stated that in many areas of Calcutta shops were completely closed, cars and trams were stopped; leaflets were distributed asking people to agitate for the release of Gandhi. A large crowd of Hindus and Muslims gathered at the Nakhoda Mosque and from there they went to attend a public gathering of about 6,000 people. 'Enquiries are being made into these matters, but so far, the indications seem to be that the disturbances were organized from outside Bengal, and the attempts to rouse the mass of the people against Government have certainly been less successful here than elsewhere.' Although the movement was confined mostly to cities but small towns and villages in some parts of India also witnessed popular agitation. However violence which broke out in course of the Satyagraha movement compelled Gandhi to call off the Satyagraha. Gandhi wrote:

'It is a matter of the deepest humiliation and regret for me. I see that I over calculated the measure of permeation of Satyagraha amongst the people. I underrated the power of hatred and ill will. My faith in Satyagraha remains undiminished, but I am only a poor creature just as liable to err as any other. I am correcting the error. I have somewhat retracted my steps for the time being. Until I feel convinced that my co-workers can regulate and restrain crowds, and keep them peaceful, I promise to refrain from seeking to enter Delhi or the other parts of the Punjab. My satyagraha, therefore, will, at the present moment, be directed against my own countrymen.' (14 April 1919, CWMG, Vol. XV).

He advised all Satyagrahis to temporarily suspend civil disobedience and asked them to adhere to the fundamental principles of Satyagraha which rejects any form of violence. The momentum that the Satyagraha created among various classes very soon lost its tempo. But anti-British sentiment that it generated did

not go waste completely. The movement might not have succeeded in forcing the government to repeal the Rowlatt Act but in many ways the Rowlatt Satyagraha proved to be a turning point in history of Indian national movement. In the following section we will introduce you to the nature and significance of this movement.

11.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE SATYAGRAHA

Despite limited organisational support and confined mostly in cities and towns the Rowlatt Satyagraha succeeded in creating a storm against the British which took the character of mass movement. Although the movement did not evoke same response from all parts of India but different classes and communities responded to Gandhi's call. Leaders before Gandhi ignored the plural character of Indian society and also did not pay much attention to mobilise common people against the British. Gandhi realised the importance of bringing people cutting across caste, class and community together to raise voice against the colonial rule. Analysing the reason for Gandhi's success in mobilising masses Ravinder Kumar argued that it was not simply 'skillful exploitation of popular religious symbols' as some scholars attributed to Gandhi's success. According to Kumar 'to the extent that Gandhi's charisma rested upon the use of a religious idiom in politics, to a corresponding extent was it the result of a perceptive insight into the social loyalties of the individual and into the manner these loyalties could be invoked for political action….Gandhi…looked upon the peoples of India as a loose constellation of classes, communities, and religious groups, and because he had no illusions about the nature of political society in the country, he was able to unite it in a way it had never been united before'. The way Gandhi tactfully used hurt sentiments of the Muslims on the issue of the treatment towards Turkey by the British helped him in winning the support of the Muslims. In a speech Gandhi said, 'It may be asked why I, a Hindu, bother my head about the Mahomedan question. The answer is that as you are my neighbours and my countrymen, it is my duty to share your sorrows. I cannot talk about Hindu-Muslim unity and fail in giving effect to the idea when the test has arrived'. (9 May 1919, CWMG Vol. XV). From his reading of India's social reality Gandhi realised that only emotive issue was suited for mass political movement in India and that was his reason for raising voice against the repressive Rowlatt legislation. At the same time it needs to be noted that it was difficult to control such diverse masses in a movement which is non-violent. Provocations as well as the government repression may result in violence and this happened in the case of the Rowlatt Satyagraha.

Judith M. Brown has viewed the Rowlatt Satyagraha as Gandhi's 'transition from peripheral to committed participation in politics'. Gandhi emerged as an all India leader of immense potential and his novel approach to politics succeeded in getting mass support. Judith Brown suggested that the success of the Rowlatt Satyagraha 'depended on local conditions and the support of local political leaders….In every place where hartal was well observed and Gandhi's propaganda welcomed it seems that the tinder of unrest had been drying for months and Gandhi's campaign was merely the spark which stated the conflagration'. Despite discontent and strain in public life Central Provinces, Madras, Marathi-speaking Bombay and Bengal did not respond much to the call of Satyagraha because the local leaders did not channelise the discontent into the movement. The Rowlatt

Satyagraha failed in repealing the Rowlatt Act, violence broke out although the essence of the movement was non-violence. 'Nonetheless,' according to Judith Brown, 'as Gandhi's first essay in all-India leadership it was remarkably instructive to those who could read it correctly, since it showed both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Mahatma in politics'.

Seeing the tone of India's national movement in the years 1920 to 1942 under Gandhi's leadership it is not difficult to assume that the Rowlatt Satyagraha provided the ideology and the method of political struggle. Gandhi being a firm believer in the ideology of non-violence never hesitated in spite of criticism to call off the movement whenever it turned violent. The movement also helped Gandhi in gaining the centre stage of national politics and the commanding position in the Congress.

11.6 SUMMARY

The Rowlatt Satyagraha is considered as the turning point in the movement against the British Raj. In response to India's support to the British war effort the British government promised to bring certain reforms but at the same time the British government was not fully confident to assuage the growing discontent among Indians against the British. This prompted them to pass the repressive Rowlatt legislation empowering the British government to curb anti-British agitation. Gandhi from his successful intervention through Satyagraha to redress the grievances of peasants and workers of Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad found an opportunity in the Rowlatt legislation to mobilize public opinion at the national level against the British government. He took the organisational support from the Home Rule Leagues, Pan-Islamist groups in India and the Satyagraha Sabha that he formed to organise Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. People in various parts of India who were aggrieved for various reasons found in this Satyagraha an opportunity to express their discontent against the British. In spite of Gandhi's appeal for not to resort to violence in some places because of police firing and instigation violence broke out and innocent people lost their life. This forced Gandhi to call off the movement. The movement failed to compel the British government to repeal the Rowlatt Act. But the kind of mass mobilisation cutting across caste, class and community identities witnessed during the movement was unprecedented. The movement was a lesson for many to mobilise common people against the British and paved the way for Gandhi's commanding position over the Congress and national politics.

11.7 EXERCISES

1) In what sense can the events described in this Unit can be said to form a turning point in Indian nationalist politics?

2) Write a note on the events related to the Jallianwala Bagh.

3) What was Rowlatt Act? Why was it unpopular among the nationalists?

UNIT 12 KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENTS*

Structure

12.1 Introduction
12.2 Beginning of the Khilafat Movement
12.3 Background to the Non-Cooperation Movement
12.4 Convergence of the Two Movements under Gandhi's Leadership
12.5 Main Phases
12.6 Contribution of the Movements in Anti-Imperialist Struggles
12.7 Summary
12.8 Exercises

12.1 INTRODUCTION

It is generally recognised that the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements were important milestones in the history of Indian nationalism. They initiated a new era of mass mobilisation and radically shaped the future of Indian polity. In a way, the Non-cooperation movement emerged out of the anti-Rowlatt movements and the Khilafat. In fact, it was the Khilafat Conference which earlier adopted the non-cooperation programme. However, it could become a full-fledged movement only after the Congress decided to adopt it. Moreover, when Mahatma Gandhi withdrew it and the Congress ratified the withdrawal, the Non-cooperation movement ended, whereas the Khilafat movement continued beyond this. Thus, the Khilafat movement had originated earlier and lasted longer than the Non-cooperation movement. But, although their trajectories were somewhat different, both were anti-imperialist movements and were brought together during 1920-22 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, in the absence of Mahatma Gandhi, it may not be possible to conceive of a successful convergence of these two anti-imperialist streams. In this Unit, we will discuss the causes for the emergence of these movements, the way they proceeded, the role of Gandhi's leadership and their impact on the Indian people and the colonial state.

12.2 BEGINNING OF THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement in India arose out of the sentiments of the Indian Muslims to protect the institution of the Khalifa in Turkey. The Khalifa in Islamic tradition was considered as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the commander of the believers and the custodian and protector of the Muslim holy places. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was the only Islamic empire and, therefore, the Sultan of Turkey was held in great esteem by the Indian Muslims as the Khalifa. As Turkey was defeated in the First World War and it was certain that the victorious Allies would impose strict terms on it, the Muslims in India launched the Khilafat movement to pressurize the British government to be lenient and preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of Khalifa.

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The ideological origins of the Khilafat movement have been explained in two ways. On the one hand, scholars have located it in the pan-Islamic sentiments and movements across the world, and their non-Indian and external character. On the other hand, some historians have emphasised its inward nature and its efforts to use pan-Islamic symbols to build a pan-Indian Muslim identity and to bring it in sync with Indian nationalism. In fact, both these trends were not contradictory.

The Khilafat may be seen as the attempt on the part of the Indian Muslim leadership to bring their pan-Islamic and Indian nationalist sentiments together. It was this synthesis that brought about the major mass mobilisation from 1919 onwards.

This quest for the unity of Indian Muslims found a religious centre in the office of Khalifa and in the person of Turkey's Sultan. Since the late nineteenth century, there was a widespread acknowledgement among the Indian Sunni Muslims of the Turkey's Sultan as the Khalifa who would protect the Muslim holy places. Thus, pan-Islamic sentiments surged among Indian Muslim leaders whenever Turkey was involved in hostilities, for example, during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 and the Greco-Turkish war of 1897. During 1911-13, a series of Balkan wars created fears in the minds of Muslim leaders that the Christian powers were attempting to crush the Ottoman Empire and the Khalifa. During and after the First World War, these sentiments again came to the fore. Turkey was part of the Axis powers along with Germany and Austria which fought against Britain and its allies. After its victory in the War, the British government removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. There were also talks about imposition of a harsh peace treaty on Turkey which would deprive it of territories and influence. Under these circumstances, a widespread movement among the Indian Muslims developed which demanded that the Khalifa must retain control over the Muslim holy places and that sufficient territories must be left with the Khalifa to enable him to defend the holy places. This movement known as the Khilafat movement quickly spread among the elite as well as among the urban popular classes and the ulama or the Muslim religious scholars. The British government was declared an enemy, Khilafat funds were flooded with money and ornaments, the Khilafat meetings were attended by thousands of people, and thousands from the border areas migrated from the land of enemy (*Dar al-Harb*) to the land of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*).

The movement derived its leadership from two streams, both involved in educational reforms for the Muslims in the wake of colonial rule. One was the Aligarh-based Westernizing intelligentsia which advocated English education and canvassed for employment in government services. The other was ulama who attempted to strengthen the traditional Islamic system of education based on Madrasas and were opposed to English education and Western manners. The presence of these two types of leadership created a variation in the movement. While the Western-educated leadership generally sought moderation, the ulama provided a radical edge to the movement. However, both these streams, at that moment of time, were united in their anti-British stance and in their support for a pan-Islamic cause.

In order to properly organise the movement, the leadership established two all-India bodies – the All-India Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat al-Ulama-e-

Hind. The earlier Muslim political organisation – Muslim League – was completely overshadowed by these two organisations until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the drive to mobilise the Muslim community for Khilafat demands began successfully. However, it was quite clear that the fight against the British could not succeed unless the non-Muslim Indians were also mobilized in a broader anti-imperialist struggle. At that point of time, the Congress as a nationalist organisation and Mahatma Gandhi as the most acceptable leader were the most suitable options. Gandhiji was quite ready to lead the Khilafat movement, but the Congress was not yet prepared for an all-India movement. However, various other circumstances made it possible for the many anti-imperialist organisations to come together on one platform.

12.3 BACKGROUND TO THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement, besides its pan-Islamic character, was also deeply anti-imperialist and nationalist in its impulse. Beside this, there were several other factors which gave rise to intense anti-imperialist feelings among the Indian people in general. The economic and political situation of the country during and after the First World War created dissatisfaction against British rule. The prices of commodities rose sharply during and after the War creating much hardship for the people. Moreover, the peasantry in some areas was also restive due to increasingly high demand of rents and taxes. This was reflected in the agitations by peasants and workers in various parts of country like Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Madras, etc.

The political optimism of the War years also received severe setback when the British government backtracked on its promises to consider nationalist demands in return for Indian support in the War. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms which resulted in the Government of India Act 1919 disillusioned the nationalists who had expected much more in the direction of self-government. The Indian National Congress, in a special session at Bombay in August 1918, condemned these proposals as 'disappointing and unsatisfactory' and demanded effective self-government. As if to add insult to injury the colonial government passed the Rowlatt Act in March 1919 which empowered the government to arrest and imprison any person without trial. The Act was passed even when the Indian members in the Central Legislative Council opposed it. This incensed the Indian people and widespread unrest followed. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi countrywide Satyagraha was held. There were huge meetings, demonstrations and strikes which sometimes also resulted in violence.

The massacre by the colonial government of peaceful protestors at Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab proved to be the last straw. On 13 April 1919, a huge but peaceful crowd gathered at Amritsar in the Jallianwala Bagh to protest against the arrest of their leaders who were participating in the anti-Rowlatt agitations. General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on the unarmed people. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured in the firing. Such brutality shocked the entire nation and ripped open the mask of civilisation the British government was wearing. The great poet, Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest and declared that the 'I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen'. Similar sentiments were widespread and it was time for an all-India nationalist movement to emerge.

12.4 CONVERGENCE OF THE TWO MOVEMENTS UNDER GANDHI'S LEADERSHIP

Gandhiji emerged on the national political scene after his constructive intervention in the peasants' and workers' struggles in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. After the War, he was emerging as almost a consensus candidate for the leadership of the Congress, particularly due to ill health of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His belief in non-violence and his method of struggle through Satyagraha had also become known to people. The anti-Rowlatt agitation and the Khilafat movement were two widespread mobilisations after the War which were directed against the colonial government, and Gandhi played a major role in both of these. It may be said that it was his leadership that made the convergence of the two anti-imperialist streams – nationalist and the Khilafat – possible during this period.

The Khilafat leaders were very keen right from the beginning to get the support of the Hindus for their cause. In this effort, they found Gandhi as their staunchest ally. He further tried to join the nationalist demand for self-rule to the Muslim assertion over Khilafat question. He declared that 'In the proper solution of the Mahomedan question lies the realisation of Swarajya'. This endeavour brought about an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity which was reflected in the subsequent mass mobilisations against the colonial rule. During the anti-Rowlatt agitations, Hindus and Muslims demonstrated together, and symbols of unity were made overtly public. The Khilafat leaders exhorted the Muslims not to kill cows for the Bakr-Id festival; an Arya Samaj leader, Swami Shraddhanand, was requested to give a speech from the pulpit of Jama Masjid in Delhi; in Amritsar, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was given the keys of the Golden Temple; in Calcutta, Hindus were admitted for the first time to the Nakhuda Mosque; in Bombay, the leaders of both communities actively tried to sell banned political literature. There were similar shows of unity throughout the movement.

On 20 March 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay. Prominent local Muslim merchants were on the Committee which initially took a moderate stand, and their activities were restricted to meetings, petitions and deputations to secure a better treatment for Turkey at the Peace Conference. It was, however, the *ulama*-driven militant trend which pushed the movement beyond its narrow confines. The advocates of a militant movement gave whole-hearted support to the anti-Rowlatt agitation and wanted to launch a non-cooperation movement against the colonial government. An all-India Khilafat Day was observed on 17 October 1919 which was a huge success. The markets were closed; fasting, prayers, meetings and *hartals* were observed. In Delhi, Madras and Bombay, there were huge audiences gathered to hear their leaders. It was clear that the new Muslim leadership was reaching a much broader urban audience. In its wake, an all-India Khilafat Conference was organised in Delhi on 23-24 November 1919 in which Gandhi was also called. The Conference passed some important resolutions in case unjust treatment was meted out to Turkey during the peace settlement: boycott of peace celebrations by Muslims, non-cooperation with the government, and boycott of British goods. Gandhi was declared to be the leader under whose guidance the movement would be carried forward and who commanded the respect of both the Hindus and the Muslims. Gandhi himself wanted all-round support for his nationalist cause and, therefore, he was not averse to the idea of bringing the two movements together provided they

conformed to his method of politics. Thus, early in 1920 he declared that the Khilafat issue was more important than constitutional reforms and even the Punjab atrocities, and he was prepared to launch a movement of non-cooperation if the peace terms were antagonistic to the interests of Turkey. Besides this, other issues necessitating a wider movement were also present. The government had refused to rescind the Rowlatt Act, the Hunter Committee appointed to enquire into the Punjab atrocities tried to shield the guilty, the British House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer's heinous crimes, and in Britain, 30,000 pounds had been collected from the public as a gift to Dyer.

The terms of the Peace Treaty, which became public in May 1920, were a blow to the wishes of the Khilafat leaders. The Ottoman Empire controlled by the Turks was dismembered. The Arab countries were declared independent of the Ottoman Empire; Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia were put under French and British mandates; Eastern Trace and Smyrna were ceded to Greece; and although Constantinople remained with Turkey, the Straits were internationalised. Such disregard of their sentiments hurt most of Indian Muslims very much. In a series of meetings held by the Khilafat Conference and in a meeting held along with Congress members on 1-2 June 1920 in Allahabad, it was decided to begin a programme of non-cooperation towards the government which would include:

- renunciation of titles conferred by the government,
- resignation from all kinds of government jobs, including military and police, and
- non-payment of taxes to the government.

Both Gandhiji and the Khilafat leaders were keen to start the non-cooperation movement as soon as possible. However, for this the support of the Congress was necessary. Certain leaders of the Congress were opposed to this move as they felt that a movement on a religious issue like the Khilafat would not be conducive for the growth of Indian polity. Their apprehensions were justified to some extent. The vocabulary of the Khilafat movement was entirely Muslim-oriented and filled with Islamic ideology and rhetoric. The arguments of even the best nationalists among them, such as Maulana Azad, was in support of allying with one set of non-Muslims (i.e., the Hindus) against another set of non-Muslims (i.e., the British). Through the entire course of the movement, the emphasis was on the separate existence of two communities and the need to unite them against the British who were considered as aggressors against both the Khalifa in Turkey and the Muslims and Hindus in India. So, although the Khilafat movement was anti-imperialist in orientation, the language of its articulation was basically Islamic.

However, at another level, strong nationalist sentiments were expressed during the course of the movement and constant appeals for communal amity were made. Moreover, the Khilafat leaders whole-heartedly supported the nationalist anti-imperialist movement like Rowlatt Satyagraha launched by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress and exhorted the Muslims to fully participate in this which resulted in the immense success of this agitation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali together toured throughout the country mobilising support for the cause of non-cooperation. Other Khilafat leaders were also active in rallying support for the cause under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, it may be said that during the summer of the 1920, there was a convergence of these two movements.

12.5 MAIN PHASES

The non-cooperation movement was formally launched on 1 August 1920. That day was also marked by the death of Bal Gangadhar Tilak which witnessed strikes and processions to mourn the passing away of this great national leader.

A special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta in September 1920 to finally deliberate and decide the issue of non-cooperation. It gave its assent to non-cooperation, despite some opposition by those interested in Council entry. By the time of the regular Congress Session in December 1920 held at Nagpur, the programme of non-cooperation was accepted without opposition. It involved the surrender of government titles and honorary positions, boycott of government schools and colleges, law courts, and foreign cloths. It could also be extended to include resignation from government service and non-payment of government taxes. Moreover, it was decided to set up national schools and colleges, establish and strengthen the panchayats for settlement of disputes, promotion of hand spinning and weaving, condemnation and renunciation of untouchability, maintenance of communal amity and strict observance of non-violence. Thus, for the first time, an open extra-constitutional programme of mass mobilisation was started by the Congress.

From January to March 1921, the main emphasis of the movement was on the boycott of government schools, colleges and law courts, and the use of *charkha*. Thousands of students left schools and colleges and joined 800 national schools and colleges that had come up throughout the country. There were massive student strikes in Calcutta and Lahore, and the educational boycott was particularly successful in Bengal and Punjab. Although the boycott of the law courts was not as successful, many leading lawyers of the country like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Saifuddin Kitchlew, C. Rajagopalachari, M.R. Jayakar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali and T. Prakasham quit their practice. The boycott of foreign cloth became a very successful programme. Thousands of volunteers moved from house to house trying to convince people about the necessity to adopt Swadeshi. The foreign-made clothes were collected and set on fire. There was also picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. The impact of this was enormous. The value of import of such merchandise fell from Rs. 102 crore in 1920-21 to Rs. 57 crore in 1921-22. Import of British cotton piecegoods declined from 1292 million yards in 1920-21 to 955 million in 1921-22. Many merchants took vow not to deal in foreign cloth. Another type of boycott movement was against liquor and toddy shops leading to a substantial fall in government revenue. Excise revenue declined in Punjab by Rs. 33 lakhs and in Madras by about Rs. 65 lakhs.

The next phase of the movement may be said to have started from the Vijayawada session of the Congress held in March 1921. It was decided to concentrate in the next three months on enrolling one crore members for the party, collecting one crore rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and distributing and installing 20 lakh *charkhas*. This phase also achieved its objectives to a large extent: Tilak fund was oversubscribed, 50 lakh members were enrolled and *charkhas* were widely popularised and khadi became the dress of the movement.

The third phase of the movement witnessed its high points in the an challenging speech by Mohammed Ali in July 1921 declaring it 'religiously unlawful for the Muslims to continue in the British Army' and asking them to resign and in the successful boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921. The

colonial government immediately arrested Mohammed Ali along with some other leaders. Another important nationalist campaign during this phase was against the visit by the Prince of Wales. As soon as he landed in Bombay on 17 November, he was greeted with city-wide strikes and demonstrations which sometimes culminated in riots. Wherever he went there were strikes and demonstrations.

In the fourth phase, both the non-cooperators and the government appeared in confrontationist mood. Khilafat leaders like Hasrat Mohani were in favour of demanding complete independence from the British rule. At the ground level the Congress was influential among a very large number of people and its Volunteer Corps became almost a parallel police force. The Congress had sanctioned its provincial committees to start civil disobedience movement wherever it was felt necessary. The government, on the other hand, had started using repression as its official policy. There were large-scale arrests, ban on meetings and prohibition of the volunteer corps. The threat of violence on both sides was increasing and it was extremely disturbing to Gandhiji who not only abhorred violence particularly among the non-cooperators but also feared that intensive state repression would crush the movement. His apprehensions proved correct when on 5 February 1922, in Chauri-Chaura in Gorakhpur district the police provoked a crowd of demonstrators. The people attacked the policemen who then fired on them. Angered by this the people set fire to the police station building in which many policemen died. When Gandhiji heard this violent incident, he decided to withdraw the movement which was later ratified by the Congress Working Committee.

Soon after Gandhiji was arrested on 10 March 1922 and was sentenced to 6 years in jail. The Khilafat movement also declined due to several national and international factors. The withdrawal of non-cooperation was a severe blow and the Khilafat leaders reacted angrily to the decision of withdrawal. Even the international situation was not favourable. The Turks themselves under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal first abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and then did away with the office of the Khalifa itself in 1924. After this, there was little justification for the movement to continue.

The withdrawal of the movement after the incident at Chauri Chaura has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Gandhi's contemporaries such as Motilal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others viewed it as a question involving violence. Later Marxist commentators such as R.P Dutt and A.R. Desai introduced a class angle arguing that it was the fear of an outburst from the masses that led to the decision to withdraw. In this view, both Gandhi and the British were on one side as both did not want this. More professional historians such as Sumit Sarkar and Gyanendra Pandey linked the withdrawal of the movement to the Gandhi's and Congress' need to retain control and the political undesirability of a spontaneous outburst. The fear of losing control over the movement prompted its withdrawal. Bipan Chandra, on the other hand, particularly in his later writings, viewed it as part of a long-term nationalist strategy to carry out the anti-imperialist movement in phases so as to gain wider hegemony. Shahid Amin has looked at the Non-cooperation movement, particularly the Chauri Chaura incident, from a completely different angle probing how the people understood Gandhi in their own ways and used his name as a legitimising device to do their own things. Therefore it was perfectly consistent for people to participate in violent incidents in the name of Gandhi.

12.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE MOVEMENTS IN ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLES

The Khilafat and non-cooperation movements played extremely important role in generating and spreading anti-imperialist consciousness among Indian people. To begin with, there was a remarkable unity between various communities. The Hindus and Muslims together participated in the movement throughout the country and often it was difficult to distinguish between non-cooperation and Khilafat meetings. Despite the Malabar happenings, in which the Muslim peasants revolted against their largely Hindu landlords and killed and converted scores of them, the Hindu-Muslim unity remained intact throughout the period. At some places, two-thirds of those arrested during the non-cooperation movement were Muslims. Gandhi played the most important role in bringing about and sustaining this relationship.

Another important issue which the non-cooperation movement brought to the fore was the need to fight against caste discrimination and untouchability. Gandhi must be credited for emphatically bringing this issue to forefront of the national politics for the first time. From then on this issue would remain quite important for the nationalist politics. The need for social justice was clearly acknowledged, pushed forward and was later enshrined in the Constitution of independent India.

Strong anti-colonial movements were afoot among various sections of population. Peasants and workers were particularly active during this period, besides the middle classes in both the urban and rural areas. Several peasant and worker movements occurred during this period. In 1921 alone there were 396 strikes involving 600,351 workers and a loss of 6,994,426 workdays. Peasant movements were even more prominent. In Awadh region of the United Provinces, in Mewar in Rajstahan, and in many districts of north Bihar there were very strong peasant movements involving millions of people. Even in the urban areas the participation by various middle class groups was unprecedented throughout the country. Moreover, Gandhi's insistence on non-violence brought a large number of women into the movement. Such mobilisation of women was a very significant phenomenon both for the nationalist movement as well as for the liberation of women from the boundaries of their houses.

Thus, these movements under Gandhi's leadership of Mahatma Gandhi revolutionised the structure of Indian politics in several ways. The most significant success of the movement should be located in its mobilisation of various sections of people across the country and the creation of political and social consciousness in them. The common people now became integral to the project of nationalism.

12.7 SUMMARY

The Khilafat issue was of central concern to the Indian Muslims in the wake of the British pressure on Turkey and the impending reduction in size of the Ottoman Empire after First World War. These religious sentiments became even more intensified due to Britain's presence as a colonial power in India. Thus, the religious and anti-imperialist feelings of Indian Muslims produced a very strong reaction against the British colonial rule. On the other hand, the failure of the colonial government to fulfill their promise of some measure of self-government

for the Indians after the War created resentment among politically active groups. In addition to this, the Rowlatt Act further hurt the feelings of a large number of Indians, and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre following the anti-Rowlatt agitation was the last straw. At this moment, Gandhiji provided an able leadership and united various strands of these anti-imperialist movements which developed into the non-cooperation movement involving millions of rural and urban people across the country. Although the movement failed to attain its objectives of either saving the Khalifa or to secure self-government for India, it mobilised a large number of people and imbued them with consciousness about their political rights. The small, powerless people in the dusty corners of the country stood against the mightiest of the empires in the world and raised their voice for freedom. In itself, it was the most significant achievement any movement could aspire to.

12.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the nature of the Khilafat movement and its role in formation of the Non-cooperation movement.

2) What was the programme of the Non-cooperation movement?

3) What were the major achievements of the Non-cooperation movement?

ignou THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

UNIT 13 REVOLUTIONARY TRENDS*

Structure

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Background

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13.8 Summary

13.9 Exercises

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of revolutionary thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the result of several internal and external influences working on the minds of the young men. The most vital factor was the growth of religious revival of the late nineteenth century. Besides this, there were several foreign influences, like the impact of the American War of Independence, the Irish struggle for freedom, the unification of Italy, the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, the Japanese victory over Russia and last but not the least, the revolution against the Tsarist regime in Russia. All these factors together introduced in the nationalist struggle a strong revolutionary element.

13.2 BACKGROUND

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by the liberal politicians and succeeded in bringing together educated, upper class Indians on a common political platform. The Congress party, although representing the most progressive sections of Indian society, failed to keep pace with the wave of nationalism which was sweeping over India during the closing years of the nineteenth century. The renaissance had led to a rediscovery of an ancient Indian past. The spirit of militancy came in the wake of religious awakening, which lent its support to Hindu revivalism and strengthened the feelings of respect for national traditions. There was a curious blending of religion with politics. Most of the revolutionary leaders of this period were deeply religious men. They loved their country and loved everything Indian. There was contempt for alien rule and alien things, Western education, Western thought and Western ways of living.

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Maharashtra and Bengal emerged as the two powerful centres of the revolutionary activities. B.G. Tilak and V.D. Savarkar provided the ideas, organisation and leadership in Maharashtra, while Bankim Chandra, Aurobindo Ghosh and Swami Vivekanand did the same in Bengal. Tilak offered the revolutionary and political interpretation of *Gita* and was deeply inspired by *Bhagwat Gita's* clarion call to duty and Krishna's exhortation to Arjun. Tilak also re-oriented the Shivaji and Ganpati festivals for political purpose and militant dreams. His speeches, writings and activities inspired the young Chapekar brothers to form *Hindu Dharm Sanrakshini Sabha*, which was responsible for the assassination of several hated British officers. Stirred by the suffering and martyrdom of Chaphekar brothers, V.D. Savarkar started an association called the *Mitra Mela* at Nasik in 1900. It was changed into *Abhinav Bharat Society* in 1904 and shifted to Poona. The title was taken from *Young Italy* of Mazzini. This society actively took part in organizing meetings, bringing out publications and celebrating Ganapati and Shivaji festivals.

The revolutionary movement in Bengal derived its inspiration from the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and the exhortations of Swami Vivekanand. The other notable contributor to the revolutionary creed was Aurobindo Ghosh. Pramathanath Mitra launched an organisation in 1901, called *Anushilan Samiti*, a name taken from Bankim's writings. It was joined by Aurobindo Ghosh, C.R. Das, Barindra Ghosh and Jatin Bannerjee. *Bhagwat Gita* was used in different ways in several publications. The greeting *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother) of *Anand Math* became a war cry of the extremist party in Bengal. Bankim gave a religious significance to the idea of motherland by declaring that in the image of the benign goddess *Durga* could be seen the future greatness of the Motherland. The new revolutionary gospel or cult of *Shakti* called upon the Bengalis to shed the blood of their oppressors.

Though religious revival generated contempt for the imperialists and instilled a yearning for independence, it alienated a sizable population of Muslims from its ranks. It seems that the ideologues of this period articulated their nationalist appeal in such a tightly structured manner that there appeared no possibility for any outsider to share their vision of 'Hindu nationalism'.

As mentioned before, the Indian revolutionary movement was further influenced by the lives of Mazzini, Garibaldi, several Irish revolutionaries, the victory of Japan over Russia in 1905 and the revolutionary principles of France, America and Russia. B.C. Pal held Mazzini to be one of the principal sources of the birth of new nationalism in India. Annie Besant also compared Mazzini and Aurobindo and described them as the men of the same type. V.D. Savarkar translated Mazzini's Autobiography into Marathi.

13.3 EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

When the revolutionary ideas were gaining ground under these influences, the partition of Bengal in 1905 fell like a bomb shell. The revolutionary forces discerned the old game of 'counterpoise of native against native' and the 'divide and rule' in the disguise of administrative efficiency. The people began to emulate Russian methods and an attempt was made to kill an ex-Magistrate of Dacca on December 23, 1907. The next target was Kingsford, the magistrate of Muzaffarpur, who had ordered several youngmen to be flogged. At Muzaffarpur, Khudi Ram

Bose and Prafulla Chaki threw a bomb on two innocent British ladies by mistake as they were traveling in a carriage similar to Mr. Kingsford. On the upshot of the Muzaffarpur case, Tilak remarked that 'the appearance of the bomb in India had changed the outlook of Indian politics.' He urged the government of India that 'the answer to the bomb was political reform and not repression.'

Sachindranath Sanyal founded *Anushilan Samiti* at Benares in 1908, which was later rechristened as Young Men's Association. Hardayal along with Amir Chand and Dinanath also became active. But Hardayal left for U.S.A. in 1911. So, till the arrival of Rash Behari Bose, the Delhi group remained languid. Bose activated the group and started a magazine called *Liberty* which taught people to make bombs. Soon an attempt was made on Viceroy Lord Hardinge's life on December 23, 1912 in which he escaped unhurt. The organisers of this attempt issued a bulletin and commended the attempt on the Viceroy's life. It invoked the authority of religious scriptures to justify the attempt on Viceroy's life: 'The *Gita*, the *Vedas* and the *Koran* all enjoin us to kill all the enemies of our Motherland irrespective of caste, creed or colour.' Rash Behari escaped arrest while four persons were hanged in this Delhi Conspiracy Case. Rash Behari Bose and his associates next made a novel attempt at simultaneous uprising with the help of Indian soldiers. The plan leaked out before the appointed date of February 21, 1915 and all prominent revolutionaries were rounded up. Rash Behari again evaded arrest and reached Japan to continue this revolutionary struggle.

The British policy of repression led to the many conspiracy cases in which several revolutionaries were eliminated. There was a lull in the revolutionary activities, but Gendalal Dixit of Mainpuri kept the torch of revolution burning for some time. He was soon arrested in the Mainpuri Conspiracy Case and died after his release in the tragic circumstances. The leaders, who evaded arrest and secretly left the country, continued their struggle from the land of their exile. Many of them chose America because the Indian revolutionaries thought of America as being 'the land of freedom and opportunity.' Hardayal started a paper called *Ghadar* in May 1913 from San Francisco. Later *Ghadar* party was named after the name of the paper. The party was strictly secular and the aim of the *Ghadar* party was to overthrow the British *Raj* in India and to establish the *Panchayat Raj* (Republican State) based on freedom and equality.

The *Ghadar* spirit also travelled to the Far East and its branch was established by Barkatullah Khan in Japan and some others did the same in Hong Kong and Shanghai. With the outbreak of the Great War, Kabul also became a rendevous of some leading rebels. It was here that a provisional government of India was established by Raja Mahendra Pratap, who became its President and Barkatullah, it's Prime Minister.

13.4 EARLY FOUNTS OF IDEOLOGICAL INSPIRATION

The activities, writings and the speeches of the revolutionaries of this period reveal a strong religious bias, romanticism and emotionalism. Many of them were convinced that "a purely political propaganda would not do for the country, and that people must be trained up spiritually to face dangers." But their religion was different from the one practised by the majority of the people of the country.

They were puritans to a certain extent. This was so because they thought it indispensable for the life of a revolutionary. At the same time they were against all sorts of narrow mindedness and prejudices which erect barriers between man and man. Despite the dominance of religiosity, the revolutionary groups were not totally devoid of a secular or even anti-religious trends. Bhupendradra Nath Dutta refused to take a vow on Hindu *shastras* alone. Some of the early revolutionaries complained that the Hindu rituals were alienating possible Muslim sympathisers. Hemchandra Kanungo and his comrades at Midnapore provided further strength to the anti-religious stance of a number of revolutionaries. Interestingly, three out of four early martyrs including Satyendranath Basu, Kanailal Dutta, and Khudiram Basu were among the sceptics.

No doubt, there were weaknesses in the ideology of the early revolutionaries and there were defects inherent in their reliance on religious teachings for advancing the cause of revolution, yet it is also clear beyond any shadow of doubt that to the staunch revolutionaries the emancipation of India through armed struggle was the supreme goal and that they looked upon religion only as a means to serve this end. This aspect should not be lost sight of or underestimated while making an assessment of the earlier phase of the revolutionary movement. They initiated the search for a revolutionary ideology and revolutionary programme by drawing lessons from our own history as well as from the histories of the revolutions in other countries. They did not preach social reform but broke down the barriers of age-old revered customs. They revolted against anything that tried to place obstacles in the path of the onward march of the revolutionary movement. Their weaknesses of emotionalism and romanticism could be overcome only by the realisation that revolution is a social process governed by definite laws. This realisation dawned upon the revolutionaries with the impact of Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

13.5 BEGINNINGS OF A NEW REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

The world economic situation worsened during the First World War. The peacetime industries and agriculture were in a miserable shape in all the belligerent countries. This was accompanied by direct and indirect taxes, which were levied on workers and peasants to replenish the empty treasury. The British government was aware of the storm of political feeling in India during the period of the First World War. The optimism generated by the Wilsonian sentiments, the solemn pledges during the war and the Montague Declaration of August 1917 was not enough to contain either the masses or the classes. They wanted these declarations to be matched by concrete actions. But all illusion about British promises was soon torn to shreds by the introduction of the Rowlatt Bill, calculated to smother free expression and political activities. The provisions of the Defence of India Act were to expire six months after the end of the war. The threat of revolutionary "terrorism" and Bolshevism goaded the British to arm its Indian administration with powers of preventive detention.

There was a chorus of universal condemnation joined even by the sophisticated elements of Indian polity like the moderates and the Congress. Gandhiji gave a call to organise protests and *hartals* all over the country. In the wake of this agitation, on 13th April 1919, the Jallianwala Bagh massacres took place at

Amritsar. It was an indirect gain to the tremendous growth of national consciousness in India. Gandhiji wrote to the Duke of Connaught in February 1921, "We are determined to battle with all our might against that un-English nature which has made Dyerism possible." He launched the non-cooperation movement and the boycott of the British goods. He assured freedom by the midnight of December 31, 1921 and appealed to the revolutionaries to desist from their activities for one year. The revolutionaries assured Gandhi that they would suspend their violent activities for one year. Many of the students, in enthusiasm, gave up their studies at the Mahatma's call and devoted whole-heartedly to the struggle for freedom. The economic and labour crisis of the time added fuel to the fire. However, the sudden suspension of the movement after Chauri Chaura led to utter frustration among Mahatma's young cadres. Many youngmen like Chandra Shekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Manmathnath Gupta and many others could not appreciate Gandhi's concept of combining politics with morality which had dealt a fatal blow to the popular movement. They were drawn towards the violent creed and thus, the sudden bottling up of a great movement saw the revival of the revolutionary activities in India.

13.6 BIRTH OF HRA (HINDUSTAN REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION)

Besides the frustration with the Gandhian experiment, the impact of the Bolshevik revolution was being felt more and more and this led to a widening of horizon among the revolutionary groups. 'Socialism, though not clearly understood, was attracting their minds and the ideals of social justice which were in a nebulous form in the earlier period were turning towards taking a distinct shape.' It was not only the young generation of revolutionaries which was exposed to the new ideas but the elders 'have also started discussing Soviet Revolution and Communism in 1924.' The upsurge of the working class after the Great War greatly influenced all of them. They watched this new social force carefully. They could see the revolutionary potentialities of the new class and desired to harness it to the nationalist revolution.

With this objective, the revolutionaries of U.P. and Punjab set in motion an organisation called the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) in 1924. The Constitution of the HRA declared its objective "to establish a Federated Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution." The association envisaged that the "basic principle of the republic shall be universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make any kind of exploitation of man by man possible." It was committed to "the organisation of labour and *kisans*" as it was necessary for the successful struggle against capitalism and feudalism. The programme of the HRA reveals that its members and founders had become advanced in their ideas. They were not inspired only by the *Bhagwat Gita*, *Anandmath*, Aurobindo, Vivekanand and the militant nationalists but they have also read about Russian, French and Irish revolutions. Jogesh Chandra Chatterji, its principal founder, was exposed to socialist thought in jail during 1916 and 1920.

13.6.1 Ideology and Programme of HRA

The Hindustan Republican Association shifted ideologically from a narrow selfless patriotism to a vague sort of socialism—and even internationalism. This

came out clearly, in its pamphlet entitled '*The Revolutionary'* published on January 1, 1925, and which was said to be the manifesto of the revolutionary party of India. This pamphlet revealed to a very large public that the revolutionaries were committed to certain lofty social ideals. The pamphlet '*The Revolutionary*' began with the words of Nietzsche that "Chaos is necessary to the birth of a new star" and the birth of life is accompanied by agony and pain. India is also taking a new birth, and is passing through that inevitable phase, when chaos, and agony shall play their destined role, when all calculations shall prove futile, when the wise and mighty shall be bewildered by the simple and weak, when great empires shall crumble down, and new nations shall arise and surprise humanity with the splendour and glory which shall be all its own. The HRA, crossing the barriers of narrow nationalism, proclaimed in its manifesto: 'The revolutionary party is not national but international in the sense that its ultimate object is to bring harmony in the world by respecting and guaranteeing the diverse pointed interests of the different nations; it aims not at competition but at co-operation between the different nations and states.'

The HRA did believe and acted according to the methods of older revolutionaries. It also believed in the armed overthrow of the imperialist government. The manifesto categorically declared that the foreigners "have no justification to rule over India except the justification of the sword, and therefore the revolutionary party has taken to the sword." However, the advancement made by the HRA was spelt out clearly in the next sentence: "But the sword of the revolutionary party bears ideas at its edge."

13.6.2 Kakori Conspiracy Case

One of the major actions of HRA was Kakori Train dacoity Case, which is also known as Kakori Conspiracy Case. As pointed out above, the HRA did believe in armed action against the imperialist government, they planned this dacoity to generate money, which they desperately needed. On August 9, 1925, a group of HRA activists including Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Chandrashekhar Azad, Manmathnath Gupta, Rajen Lahiri and others stopped a train at Kakori near Lucknow and walked away with the government cash from the guard's coach. No innocent passenger was harmed. Within a few months, most of the revolutionaries were arrested and tried in the famous Kakori Conspiracy Case. Four of them including Bismil and Ashfaqullah were hanged while others were sentenced for different jail terms.

13.7 FORMATION AND ACTIVITIES OF HSRA (HINDUSTAN SOCIALIST REPUBLIC ASSOCIATION)

The late 1920s saw severe economic depression followed by intense labour upsurge. The Indian working class was increasingly coming under Bolshevik influence leading to the formation of a number of labour unions with distinct communist leanings. Besides, there were youth movements in 1928 and 1929, raising the demand for complete independence and radical social and economic changes. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose organised the Independence for India League as a pressure group within the Congress to carry forward the campaign for acceptance of the goals of complete independence and what the

U.P. branch of the League in April, 1929 described as a 'socialist democratic state in which every person has the fullest opportunities for development... (with) state control of the means of production and distribution.' But once again, this left theoretical radicalism of the Congress could not find adequate expression in concrete action or organisation. Jawaharlal Nehru, when questioned by Gandhi, went back to the liberal, bourgeois politics of the Congress, leaving the youth charged but frustrated.

The HRA was frustrated with the verbal radicalism of the Congress, and was itself rendered weak and powerless after the Kakori Conspiracy Case. Thus it decided to rebuild the organisation. Most of the experienced revolutionaries were behind the bars and the rest were underground to escape arrest. In these circumstances, the young members of the HRA led by Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Shiv Verma, Chandra Shekhar Azad and Vijay Kumar Sinha, undertook the task of reorganising the party. A meeting of the important members was held in 1927 at Kanpur, primarily for this purpose. It was soon followed by another crucial meeting for the formation of the Central Committee of HRA on 8 and 9 September, 1928 in the romantic surroundings of the ruins of the *Feroz Shah Kotla* at Delhi. This was an important meeting which was attended by ten participants from U.P., Bihar, Punjab and Rajasthan. The meeting resulted in the adoption of a revolutionary programme with an advanced revolutionary socialist outlook for their organisation. Finally Bhagat Singh and his friends succeeded in convincing their critics who agreed to rechristen the association by including socialism as one of the main goals. Thus, the name of the Hindustan Republican Association was finally changed to Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

The HRA aimed at the establishment of a Federal Republic of the United States of India where the basic principle would be adult suffrage, while the HSRA, as indicated by its name, proclaimed the goal of establishing a socialist republic. Long before this, Bhagat Singh and his comrades formed *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* in Lahore with a distinct goal of establising a socialist republic in India. Bhagat Singh was convinced that the salvation of India lay not merely in political independence but in economic freedom. The newly formed HSRA also decided that the soldiers of the HSRA will leave their homes, keep no contact with their families and devote full time and energy for the party work. Religious communalism and ritualism were banned.

13.7.1 Simon Commission and the Revolutionaries

"The year 1928 was, politically, a full year," writes Pandit Jawaharlal, "with plenty of activity all over the country." The Trade union movement was pushing itself steadily and its militant ideology was fostering class consciousness among the workers. In this electrified atmosphere, the Simon Commission landed in Bombay on February 3, 1928. It was an all-white commission appointed to report and review the political situation of India. No Indian was given a place on the Commission which was considered an affront to national respect by all the political parties of the country. The major segments of the country unanimously decided to boycott the Commission. It was greeted with *hartal* in Bombay and slogans like 'Go Back Simon' were raised.

There were conflicts between the police and the people at various places but Lahore brought matters to a head. The anti-Simon Commission demonstration

was led by Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore and as he stood by the roadside he was assaulted and hit on his chest with a baton by a young English police officer. For Lalaji, being a heart patient, a severe blow on the chest proved fatal. His death sent a wave of indignation and the young of the country took it as an insult to the nation. The HSRA decided to kill Scott, the Chief police executive, who was present on the spot.

Apprehending fear to his life Scott took shelter in the police training school from where he seldom came out. Later on Saunders, his deputy was chosen as the target and his movements were watched for several days. The December 17 1928 was fixed for Saunders' murder and Rajguru, Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad were entrusted with the responsibility. A great sensation spread in Lahore at the murder of the Deputy Superintendent of Police. The next day, red leaflets written in English were distributed by the HSRA men saying "Bureaucracy alerted. Lala Lajpat Rai's death is avenged by the murder of J.P. Saunders." The revolutionaries repeated their objective in the leaflet saying, "We are sorry for shedding the blood of a man but it is necessary to shed blood on the altar of revolution. We aim at such a revolution which would end exploitation of man by man." Though it became known that the Saunders' murder was an act of revolutionaries but the police failed to arrest them. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Azad escaped by adopting various guises.

13.7.2 Assembly Bomb Explosion

The HSRA planned to bomb the Assembly Hall if the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill were passed by the special powers of the Governor General. They wanted to show that if the government can ignore the voice of the majority and rush through the passage of the Bill by resorting to Governor General's powers, then the HSRA can also pay back in the same coin. These bills were brought by the Indian Government to suppress the struggle being waged against the establishment by the workers and revolutionaries. Bhagat Singh, while commenting on these bills said:

'There is no place for justice in British imperialism. They do not want to give even a breathing space to the slaves and instead, want to suppress them. They want to rob them and kill them. More and more oppressive laws will be passed and the dissenting voices will be put down. Let us see what happens. Only sacrifice can save us from this suppression. The eyes of Indian and British members of the Assembly will have to be opened.'

He felt that the awakening of the working class indicated a new turn in the political life of the country. Thus, he wanted the HSRA to do an 'action' which should express the solidarity of the party with the labour and peasant movement. The Central Committee of HSRA at first decided to send Jaidev Kapoor and B.K. Dutt to throw the bombs, but on Sukhdev's exhortation and friendly advice, Bhagat Singh accompanied B.K. Dutt. On 8th April, 1929, the deafening voice of the bomb explosion in the Assembly shook the empire to its foundations. Members of the Assembly ran helter skelter. Both the bombs exploded without doing serious harm to anyone. The young men could have escaped under the cover of smoke but they held their ground and shouted slogans at the top of their voice:

"Long Live Revolution"
"Down with Imperialism"
"Workers of the World Unite"

They threw bundles of red leaflets on behalf of HSRA and gave its message to the whole world. The message began with the quotation of the French revolutionary Valliant: "It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear." Both of them were arrested on the spot. Thus occurred the great event, which sent a chill down the spine of British imperialism and gladdened the hearts of freedom fighters throughout the world. Bhagat Singh used the court as a platform to popularise the cult of socialism. Bhagat Singh's statement made it clear that the HSRA was, in the true sense, fighting for the masses and also specified that he intended to bring about a classless society. Within a few months, the court found them guilty of waging a war against the state and transported both of them for life on June 12 1929. However, Bhagat Singh was taken to Lahore to stand trial in the Lahore Conspiracy Case for the killing of J P Saunders.

13.7.3 Lahore Conspiracy Case

The trial went on for about two years, and the revolutionaries used the court platform very effectively to clear the misunderstandings being spread by the government about them. They even organised long hunger strikes to fight for better living conditions and facilities for all the political prisoners in jail who were treated like ordinary criminals by the British government. One of the revolutionaries Jatin Das sacrificed his life on September 13 1929, after 63 days of hunger strike, which caused a huge uproar in the whole of India. Finally, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were hanged on March 23 1931 on the banks of river Sutlej. The execution of the three martyrs was condemned all over the country and Bhagat Singh in particular became a household name.

13.7.4 Chittagong Armoury Raid

While Bhagat Singh and his associates were in prison and facing trial in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, Surya Sen planned a revolutionary action in Bengal called the Chittagong Armoury Raid. The well organised raid was conducted on April 18 1930 under the leadership of Surya Sen, popularly called Master da. They took control of the telegraph office as well as telephone exchange and cut off all communication channels to Calcutta and Dacca and the other group took control of the club. They distributed leaflets explaining the object of the raid, the leaflets were signed by Surya Sen as president of the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong branch. The attacks continued for few years and gradually the revolutionaries were arrested and punished in sham trials. Surya Sen himself was arrested in February 1933, while Kalpana Dutt and Tarakeshwar Dastidar were captured on May 19 1933. In the Armoury Raid Case, Surya Sen and Dastidar were sentenced to death while several others were sentenced for life imprisonment. Surya Sen was hanged on January 12 1934 in Chittagong jail with his last message of "ideal and unity" and "a golden dream...a dream of free India."

13.8 SUMMARY

The revolutionary groups remained active till the mid 1930s but later most of the groups were weakened due to arrests and propaganda. However, they had an

important role in creating an upsurge and awareness among the youth, which was constructively harnessed by mass movements led by the Mahatma. We normally ignore this important contribution of the revolutionary actions from early sporadic ones to Saunders' murder, Assembly Bomb explosion to Chittagong Conspiracy Case. Despite the fact that the Indian National Congress remained in the forefront, fighting for Indian independence, we cannot ignore the immense contributions made by the Indian revolutionaries in advancing the cause of freedom.

13.9 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the early developments of revolutionary movement in India.

2) What were the differences between HRA and HSRA?

3) Discuss the ideology and activities of the revolutionaries during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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UNIT 14 RESISTANCE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE COUNCILS*

Structure

14.1 Introduction

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14.1 INTRODUCTION

The period after the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement and the beginning of the civil disobedience can be best understood through the activities of the Swaraj Party. The importance of the Swaraj Party is that it introduced a new strand of political activity within the nationalist movement, that of council entry. It extended the area of the nationalist movement to the heart of legislative politics and the constitutional arena. Later, in the 1930s, this became a fairly dominant strand within Congress politics, when in 1937 Congress contested elections and formed governments in seven provinces.

The period between the two agitations is very important. During this period the national movement was carried on and sustained, not by direct agitation against the British, but through the activities of the Swaraj Party and Gandhi's constructive programme. It is important to recognise that whereas the nature of the activities of the national movement underwent a change during this period, it did not imply a break or a discontinuation in the basic trajectory of the national movement. In this Unit, we will discuss this period (1922-29), will focus on the context in which the Swaraj Party was born, and also talk about the nature of the constructive programme initiated by Gandhi. Towards the end, the Unit will also introduce to you the Nehru Report as the direct extension of the activities of the Swaraj Party and the controversies that revolved around it.

14.2 BACKGROUND

Swarajism may be understood as a 'political experiment' within the long life of the national movement. The essence of this experiment was that the national movement, in order to be successful, must reach out to all arenas of political life and activity. In other words, it meant extending the national movement to the

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legislative bodies also. Colonial rule was to be questioned and challenged inside the Legislatures. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das were the main protagonists of this idea. They gave it a concrete shape by forming a Swaraj Party within Congress in 1923. There was a background and a context to the birth of the idea of Swarajism.

The impetus to the Swarajist politics was provided by the nature of the Government of India Act of 1919 and the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in 1922. Let us briefly look at the two.

The end of the First World War had raised great hopes and expectations among Indians of getting important constitutional benefits from the British. All such hopes turned into bitter disappointment with the promulgation of the GOI Act of 1919. It was believed that in some ways the Act of 1919 was even more retrograde than the Act of 1909. The main disappointment of the Indians pertained to the fact that a substantial proportion of seats in the legislative bodies, both at the centre and in the provinces, were to be filled by non-elected members nominated by the government. Out of a total of 145 members, as many as 40 were to be nominated by the government. This reduced the power of the elected members quite significantly. Under the Act of 1919, first elections were to be held in 1920. Under the non-cooperation movement, boycott (of titles, educational institutions of the government, law courts and the legislatures) was one of the weapons of the movement. It was in these circumstances that C.R. Das, prominent Congress leader from Bengal, argued that instead of boycotting the legislatures, Congressmen should contest elections, enter the Assemblies and oppose British government from there. The proposal was rejected by the All India Congress Committee (AICC). This was the beginning of the idea of Swarajism.

The non-cooperation movement was suddenly brought to a halt in May 1922 following the violence at Chauri Chaura. Almost immediately after the withdrawal of the movement, Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years imprisonment. At this point the national movement was at a crossroad and there were two important questions confronting the Congress leadership:

- Should the non-cooperation movement be resumed again or not?
- What should be the Congress stand on the 1923 elections to the legislatures?

To get a sense of the mood of the people on these questions, the AICC constituted an enquiry committee in June 1922. The committee consisted of Hakim Ajmal Khan, Vitthalbhai Patel, Motilal Nehru, Srinivas Aiyangar, M.A. Ansari and C. Rajagopalachari. The committee toured the country and submitted its report. All the members unanimously agreed that the country was not ready for a round of non-cooperation. On the question of council-entry, however, there was a difference of opinion. Ajmal Khan, Vithalbhai Patel and Motilal Nehru were in favour of council entry by Congressmen and the remaining members were against it.

In months to come, this minor division within the committee acquired large proportions and it looked as if this question might split the entire Congress organisation. The advocates of council entry came to be identified as pro-changers and the opponents were called no-changers. Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel were the other important no-changers. Since the AICC was unable to come to a conclusion on this issue, the final decision was left for the annual session of the Congress to be held at Gaya in December 1922. Chittaranjan Das was the president of the Congress at this time.

At the Gaya session of the Congress the real differences between the two groups came to the fore. The pro-changers wanted Congressmen to contest elections, enter the legislative bodies and put up stiff resistance to the British inside the legislatures. The no-changers, on the other hand, believed that council entry would dilute the spirit of non-cooperation and amount to cooperation with the British. Instead of council entry they suggested that the national movement should be advanced by carrying on Gandhi's constructive programme. Constructive programme consisted of promoting Hindu-Muslim unity, Khadi and a social campaign against untouchability. Both the groups campaigned for their respective course of action. The final decision was left for the general session of the Congress. The general Congressmen voted for the no-changers. They got 1740 votes as against 890 for the pro-changers. The verdict of the Congress was overwhelmingly against council entry. Since this decision was against the thinking of president C.R. Das, he resigned from Congress presidentship.

The pro-changers were defeated but not demoralised. They realised that a fairly large section of Congressmen was in favour of council entry. Therefore immediately after the Gaya Congress, they convened a meeting of their supporters and decided to form a new party within the Congress. They gave it the name of Congress Khilafat Swaraj Party. C.R. Das was the president and Motilal Nehru the general secretary of the new party.

The formation of a new group within the Congress created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. The possibility of a split within Congress became quite imminent. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the new president of the Congress, tried to bring about unity between the two groups but did not succeed. In early 1924, the British government released Gandhi on account of his deteriorating health. Gandhi was initially completely opposed to the pro-changers and he refused to treat council-entry as part of the Congress programme of non-cooperation. Gradually however, a compromise was worked out between Gandhi and Chittaranjan Das at the Belgaum session of the Congress in 1924. Under the new agreement, the Congress leadership agreed to treat 'Swarajism' as the official part of the Congress programme. A split in the Congress was thus averted.

14.3 ESSENCE OF SWARAJISM

The naming of the Swaraj Party (Congress Khilafat Swaraj Party) was done with a great deal of thought. At the time of its formation, many people within the Congress had misgivings about the party. They considered it as anti-Congress and pro-British. The first task of the party after its formation was to remove these misunderstandings. They had full agreement with Congress-Khilafat alliance and they also did not project their party as an alternative to Congress. Rather they emphasised the Congress connection by considering their Swarajist experiment to be a part of Congress programme. Probably the earliest justification for the existence of Swaraj Party was provided by Motilal Nehru in a statement. He argued that, under changed circumstances, the boycott of legislatures had become obsolete and, therefore, the policy of boycott should be changed. The statement, signed by Motilal Nehru, Ajmal Khan and Vithalbhai Patel, said:

'Times have now changed. Circumstances have altered. The period of struggle is indefinitely prolonged. Measures affecting the daily life of the people are being enacted in the legislature year after year. Fresh taxation and huge liabilities are

being imposed with the help and in the name of the so-called representatives of the people, and *nolens volens* [willingly or unwillingly] the people will have to submit to them. Under these circumstances it is a question for consideration how far the hold of the Congress over the masses can remain unaffected. Suppose the Congress persists in the boycott of the councils in its present form, and it is found that a greater percentage of voters record their votes on the occasion, our claim would be discredited. We are inclined to believe that the policy of abstention has lost its charm, and it is likely that a greater percentage of voters will vote at the ensuing elections. In that event, the success gained at the last elections will be a thing of the past and the whole movement will be adversely affected.' (Quoted in D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 2, 1951, New Delhi, p. 113).

Both Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das believed that 'Swarajism' was an effective way in which the constitutional credibility of British imperialism could be eroded. Through the Acts of 1909 and 1919 the British had tried to assert the constitutional basis of their rule. They had also claimed (through their declaration of self-rule in 1917) that they were gradually preparing Indians for democracy and self-government. The Swarajism, as conceived by the leaders of the Swaraj Party, was an attempted rebuttal of these British claims. They believed that by entering the legislatures they can make the constitutional experiment of the British null and void. C.R. Das made this point clear in a statement: "We have so far boycotted the Councils from the outside…It should now be the duty of Congress to successfully boycott Councils from the inside." He believed that the introduction of democracy as claimed by the Act of 1919 was a mere camouflage. The real power remained with the British bureaucracy. But this power of the bureaucracy could be effectively opposed only from within. Das emphasized the practical aspects of the Swarajist politics thus:

'We will assert our basic rights in the Councils and the Assembly. For the acceptance and the protection of those rights we will demand a Constitution. It is quite probable that the British government will not agree to it. Then all the Swarajists will non-cooperate with the government bureaucracy. We will oppose every government Bill. We will not allow the budget to be passed. We will stall every proposal of the government. Thus we will defeat every Bill proposed by the government.'

Some Congressmen accused Swarajists of practising negative and obstructionist politics. Replying to this charge, Das said: "We are surrounded by British bureaucracy from all sides. Under these circumstances it is not possible to build anything new without destroying something. But we should not forget that whereas we are destroying something, our aim is to build something new." It should thus be clear that Swarajism was not conceptualized as an alternative to mainstream Congress politics. Rather it was intended to enrich the Congress politics by adding a new dimension to it.

14.4 SWARAJISTS AT THE POLLS

Elections were held under the GOI Act in 1920, 1923 and 1926. The 1920 elections were unanimously boycotted by Congress as part of the official programme of boycott. Swaraj Party contested the elections in 1923 and 1926. The 1923 elections were held almost immediately after the formation of the Party and it

did not have enough time to prepare for them. The elections were scheduled to be held in November 1923 and it was not before October that Party was able to start its preparations for the elections. The election offices were opened in the provinces and districts. Volunteers were mobilised. The lists of candidates were prepared. Financial resources had to be mobilised. The literature, booklets and pamphlets for the election campaign were prepared. The manifesto of the party was released in October. It declared Swaraj as the ultimate aim of the Party. Making of their own Constitution by the Indians was projected as the major objective towards the fulfillment of the aim of Swaraj Party. It was made clear that a Constitution for India could only be made keeping in mind the specificity of Indian conditions. Therefore an alien government sitting in England was not competent to make a Constitution for India, suitable for Indian conditions. Swaraj Party demanded in its manifesto that the Indian people should have the right to frame their own Constitution. It was highlighted that the act of Constitution making will eventually take India to Swaraj.

The demand of making one's own Constitution was both novel and important. This indeed was a new idea introduced in the nationalist politics. The British had ruled India with help of certain Acts passed by the British parliament from time to time. The moderate nationalist leadership used to generally demand better laws or an improvement in the existing ones. But it did not question the 'right' of the British government to make laws for India. **By asserting their right to make their own Constitution, the Swarajists added a new dimension to nationalist politics**. The politics of council entry was not to be an end in itself, but only the first step. Eventually this was to culminate in full fledged constitutionalism, i.e., Constitution making by Indians themselves. In the years to come, particularly in the 1930s, the demand for a Constituent Assembly became a central demand of the national movement and Jawaharlal Nehru integrated it into the Congress programme. In this way, Swarajism went beyond the moderate politics and provided the connecting bridge between the constitutional politics practised by the moderates and Jawaharlal Nehru's demand for a Constituent Assembly. The manifesto also made clear the meaning of council entry. The Swarsjists were instructed not to accept any office in the councils and the Assembly. The membership of the party was confined only to Congressmen. The members of the party were instructed to behave as Congressmen in the legislatures and uphold the dignity and prestige of Congress.

It is important to recognise that this was the first time the nationalist leaders were going to participate in the elections. They did not have any experience of electoral politics. For an effective management of the election activities leaders like C.R. Das (for Bengal, Central provinces and Madras presidency), Motilal Nehru (for United Provinces) and Vithalbhai Patel (for Bombay Presidency) took it upon themselves to organise the elections both in the provinces and at the centre. On the whole Swaraj Party spent about Rs. 25 thousand in UP and around 30 thousand in Bengal. On an average the amount of Rs. five hundred was considered necessary for one constituency. Even by the standards of those days this was not a very big amount.

In the 1923 elections, the party performed well but well below its own expectations. The following table gives us an idea of performance of Swaraj Party at the polls:

Assembly and Councils	Total Elected Seats	Seats won by Swaraj Party
Central Legislative Assembly	105	42
Madras Council	98	14
Bombay Council	86	23
Bengal Council	111	47
UP Council	101	31
Central Provinces Council	54	40
Punjab Council	71	12
Bihar and Orissa Council	73	12
Assam Council	39	13

The party acquired a majority in CP and emerged as the largest single party in the Central Assembly, Bombay and Bengal. In UP it registered an impressive presence but in other places the performance of the party was generally disappointing. On the whole the party won 234 seats (42 at the centre and 192 in the provinces). Given the lack of time for preparations this was an impressive performance. At many places the party had not been able to find a suitable candidate. In Bombay for instance the party was able to field only 24 candidates (at 86 constituencies) and won 23. In Bihar and Orissa it fielded only 13 candidates and won 12. Likewise, from UP the party fielded only 33 candidates and won 31.

It was thus from 1923 that the Swaraj Party began its politics in the legislatures. The years from 1923 to 1936 were the high point in Swarajist politics of council entry. It gave a concrete shape to the politics of opposition in the councils. The party also scored some crucial victories, both real and psychological, against the government. What did the parry do in the Assembly and in the legislative councils?

14.5 SWARAJISTS IN THE ASSEMBLY AND IN THE COUNCILS

Motilal Nenru became the leader of opposition in the Central Legislative Assembly. At the very outset he tried to obtain support for the Swarajist agenda from among the other Indian members in the Assembly. The Assembly consisted of members nominated by the government, elected supporters of the government, Liberals and the independent members, not from any party. From among this lot Motilal Nehru tried to mobilise the Liberals and the independents. He did it by portraying swaraj not as the demand of his party but as a national demand of all Indian members. He declared at the floor of the Assembly: “We have different styles of functioning. But otherwise the differences among the Swarajists, Liberals and the independents are not very real.” Such a perspective enabled him to create a large united front in the Assembly against the government. He was able to successfully reach out to Liberal leaders like Tej Bahadur Sapru, and liberal communal leaders like Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Madan Mohan Malaviya.

At the time of the convening of the first session of the Assembly, Mahatma Gandhi was in jail. The first task of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly was to give a notice to the government for Gandhi's release. The proposal was almost certain to receive support from other Indian members. Therefore, sensing the mood of the Assembly, the government released Gandhi the day the proposal was to be tabled. This was the first victory of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly. In February 1924, a resolution was moved by a non-Swarajist member, demanding a Royal Commission for a revision of the GOI Act 1919 so as to secure for India the status of a Dominion within the British Empire. Motilal Nehru moved an amendment proposing that the new Constitution should be framed by a representative Round Table Conference and approved by the Indian Legislative Assembly. The amendment was opposed by the government benches but it got overwhelming support from the elected members. This was the first and perhaps the most spectacular victory of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly.

In 1926, Swaraj Party moved a proposal for the release of political prisoners. During the non-cooperation movement many political leaders had been arrested. Some had been imprisoned without any trial. Many revolutionaries had also been exiled from the country. The party therefore put forward the demand for the release of political prisoners and the repatriation of the exiled leaders. But this demand did not receive the support of other Indian members of the Assembly and was defeated. Throughout the period (1923-26) Swaraj Party opposed the government budget and other government proposals. However, this process of non-cooperation in the Assembly could not continue for very long after 1926. Therefore, the party as a whole decided to stage a 'walk out' of the Assembly.

Before the 'walk out' Motilal Nehru gave a historic speech on the floor of the Assembly. He said: "We know that in the present state of the country, rent as it is by communal discord and dissensions, civil disobedience, our only possible weapon is not available to us at present. But we know also that it is equally unavailing to us to remain in this Legislature and in the other Legislatures of the country any longer. We go out to-day not with the object of overthrowing this mighty Empire. We know we cannot do so even if we wished it. We go out in all humility with the confession of our failure to achieve our objective in this house on our lips." (K.M. Panikkar and A. Pershad (ed.), *The Voice of Freedom: Selected Speeches of Pandit Motilal Nehru*, Bombay, 1961, p. 290.)

The pattern of protest against the government continued also in the provincial councils. Given its majority status in CP, the protest was much more effective there. But the nature of Swarajist activities in all the provinces was very similar. Government proposals were opposed; no confidence motion against the government was placed on the floor; the government budget was criticized and opposed. And no office of any kind was accepted by the Swaraj Party members during the initial years.

As you are probably aware, the GOI Act of 1919 had introduced the scheme of Dyarchy. Under this scheme, the ministerial responsibilities were divided between reserved subjects (directly under the British) and the transferred subjects (brought under the control of the elected representatives). Land revenue administration, Police, judiciary, press, and irrigation were reserved subjects. Local self-government, medical administration, education and agriculture were brought under transferred subjects. When the Swaraj Party legislators were asked

(particularly in CP and Bengal where they had a sizable presence) to take over the transferred subjects, they refused. C.R. Das, the leader in the Bengal council, said: "All the members of the Swaraj Party are determined, not to run Dyarchy, but to end it."

It can be said that the Swarajist activities constituted an important intervention in the nationalist politics of the times. But this type of politics had its own limitations. Motilal Nehru admitted in 1926 that the Swarajist politics had not been able to take the country forward towards Swaraj. Even within the Assembly the government was able to override the opposition of the Swaraj Party. The Viceroy could always use his special powers, granted by the Act of 1919, to have all the government proposals passed. The government proposals could thus become the 'Act' without needing the support of the majority of the house. Therefore the opposition by the Swaraj Party had no substantive value in the Assembly.

What were then the main accomplishments of the Swaraj Party?

14.6 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SWARAJ PARTY

It is clear that the Swarajist leaders had not been successful in changing the functioning of the Assembly and the councils. The British control over the legislatures remained unaltered. No major breakthrough occurred there. Yet there were some crucial ways in which the Swarajists were able to contribute to the growth of the national movement.

First, they were able to bring the diverse and disparate nationalist elements close to each other and on a common platform. Motilal Nehru had started believing in the 1920s that the different political forces in the country had begun crystallizing into supporters of imperialism and those of nationalism. *This* had become the major dividing line. It was therefore both possible and desirable to bring nationalists of all shades and colours together. This enabled him to politically reach out to Mohammad Ali Jinnah on the one hand, and Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lajpat Rai, on the other. The Swarajists tried to create a broadest possible alliance of the Indian members in the Assembly and the councils. However towards the latter part of the Assembly, not only cracks developed in this broad nationalist alliance, even the unity within the ranks of the Swarajists became difficult.

Second, The Swarajists activities did popularise the demand for Swaraj. This was an important achievement. The Swarajists did not get coopted into 'colonial constitutionalism', and their connections with the outside nationalist politics remained strong as ever. They were also able to influence public opinion. Their activities on the floor of the Assembly got a good coverage in the press. By this time, a large number of English newspapers had acquired pan-India coverage. The Swadeshi activities were reported in both the English and the other newspapers in Indian languages.

The accomplishments of the Swaraj Party can be better understood by comparing the two Assembly sessions. Because of the Congress boycott of the 1920 elections, there was hardly any nationalist presence in the Assembly and the government

faced no opposition there. By contrast, during 1923-26, all the government Bills faced stiff opposition. Five times the government was compelled to withdraw the Bill. Most of the government proposals were passed only by invoking the special powers of the Viceroy.

14.7 SWARAJISM AFTER 1926: DECLINE, DISINTEGRATION, MERGER

By the time the elections of 1926 were held, the political climate of the country had changed quite a bit. This was bound to affect the destiny of the Swaraj Party. The subsequent decline and disintegration was partly a result of this change. After the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation movement, the country went through a series of communal riots at an unprecedented level. UP alone experienced around 91 instances of communal violence during 1923-27. It was during this period that the politics of communalism began to enter Indian politics in a big way. Under these circumstances, the kind of working alliances that Swaraj Party had built up with leaders like Jinnah and Malaviya, became vulnerable and eventually broke down. This weakened the position of the party in the Assembly and in the councils.

There was also an increasing disillusionment with the party and its policies. Those who expected the party to bring about a political breakthrough through legislative methods were disappointed to see that the party's opposition to any proposal had not been able to prevent it from becoming an Act. The politics of opposition in Assembly had also begun to lose its novelty.

Yet another failure of some consequence was the rise of dissension and factionalism within the party itself. C.R. Das died in 1925 (at the age of 55) and many party members developed doubts regarding the efficacy of obstructionism in the legislatures. Some members began to advocate the alternative politics of 'Responsive Cooperation' in the legislatures. M.R. Jayakar and N.C. Kelkar were some of the major exponents of this policy. As a part of this policy many Swarajist members accepted office in the Legislatures. Vithalbhai Patel accepted the office of the president of the Central Assembly. All this was against the official and declared policy of the Swaraj Party.

As was expected, the position of the Swaraj Party declined at the time of the 1926 elections, compared to 1923. But what rendered the politics of legislative obstruction redundant was a sudden change in the political climate of the country. This change was brought about by the arrival of the 'all white' Simon Commission to assess the impact of the Act of 1919 and to make fresh proposals for India's constitutional advance.

14.8 SIMON COMMISSION: RETURN OF NON-COOPERATION

The Act of 1919 had stipulated that its functioning would be assessed after ten years. In September 1924, Motilal Nehru had proposed in the Assembly that this assessment should be done earlier. This proposal was passed in spite of government opposition. As a result, the British government announced in 1927 the setting up of an Indian Statutory Commission. The Commission consisted of

members of British parliament and was headed by John Simon. The mandate given to the Commission was to "enquire into the system of government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in British India.". The decision to appoint the Simon Commission was generally received in Indian political circles with resentment and disapproval. The immediate cause for resentment was the non-inclusion of any Indian in the Commission. All the major political parties decided to oppose and boycott the Commission. This in a way also united the various strands within Congress and the political differences between no-changers and pro-changers disappeared. Motilal Nehru was to later declare regarding the Simon Commission: "While the Commission was a farce, its Report was even a greater farce." He also decided in 1927 that the legislatures will now have to be opposed from the outside rather than inside. On the floor of the Assembly Lajpat Rai proposed a boycott of the Commission and Motilal Nehru supported it. He declared on the floor of the Assembly: "British parliament, British people and British government have no right to impose a Constitution on India against our wish." Thus with the arrival of Simon Commission, the mainstream Congress politics regained its unity that had temporarily got side-tracked since 1922.

It was decided that the mere boycott of Simon Commission was not enough and that Indians should also create an alternative to the Report of the Commission. This implied creation of a draft of an Indian constitution by the Indian leaders. Therefore after the successful boycott of the Simon Commission, an all-parties conference was convened in February 1928 under the leadership of M.A. Ansari, an important Congress leader. The conference constituted a sub-committee to draft a Constitution for India. Making a Constitution for the country was one of the demands of Swaraj Party. Therefore Motilal Nehru was made the president of the sub-committee. Prominent liberal leader Tej Bahadur Sapru was another important member of the sub-committee. With this decision ended the separate political existence of Swaraj Party. The political life of Swaraj Party spanned a period between 1923 and 1928. It started with council entry and culminated in exercise of a Constitution making for India. In July 1928 the sub-committee presented a Constitution to the country that came to be known as Nehru Report.

Nehru Report needs to be recognised as one of the major political documents of the Indian nationalist movement. Its importance lay in the fact that it served as a precursor to the Indian Constitution that was made in 1950. The Indian Constitution borrowed many clauses and provisions from the Nehru Report. It was the first constitutional document prepared by the Indians for themselves. It also effectively demolished the British imperialist claim that Indians were incapable of constructive constitutional politics. The Nehru Report was predictably rejected by the British. Unfortunately it could not achieve any consensus among the Indian parties. By this time, the differences between Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha had become irreconcilable, and it was simply not possible to accommodate the demands of both within a single document. As a result the Nehru Report remained a mere paper document and not a powerful and vibrant constitutional alternative that it was expected to be. Its significance was more psychological than real. It however represented a high point in Swarajist politics. The Swarajist politics was inaugurated with the agenda of 'council entry'. The council entry had distanced Swaraj Party from Congress party and even though their links were never broken, the Swaraj Party functioned as a kind of parallel to mainstream Congress politics. The politics of council entry logically

culminated in the politics of constitution-making and with this the distance between the two disappeared. The Swaraj Party therefore should be understood as an important political strand that emanated from within the Congress, ran parallel to it during 1923-28 and finally merged back into the parent body.

In a decade's time, a new Act was passed by the British in 1935. This Act granted provincial autonomy and this time Congress as a whole decided to contest elections in the provinces. Congress scored a comprehensive victory in these elections and, after some debate, formed governments in seven out of the 11 provinces. So in a way the Swarajist programme was adopted by Congress as a whole in 1937. This was the ultimate victory of the Swaraj Party.

14.9 GANDHIAN CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

As was mentioned earlier in the Unit, the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement resulted in a diversifcation in nationalist activities. Council entry was one of the strands that emanated from this vacuum created because of the withdrawal. At the other extreme was violent revolutionary activity and many young people in UP, Punjab and Bengal took to underground violence. Yet another form the movement evolved was that of constructive programme. This was a crucial component of Gandhian strategy of struggle against imperialism. It revolved around the promotion of Khadi, spinning, village industries, national education and Hindu-Muslim unity, struggle against untouchability and social uplift of the Harijans, and boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. Above all constructive work meant going to the villages and focusing on village reconstruction. Under this impulse many Ashrams opened up in villages and took up the work of spinning and Khadi.

The main importance of this type of work for the nationalist struggle was that it provided continuity to the struggle and it helped to link up different phases of agitations. It prepared people for the next round of agitation and prevented demoralisation and disillusionment among the participants in the struggle. Gandhi was fully aware that a prolonged phase of struggle could not be easily sustained by the masses. Masses did not have inexhaustible reserves of political energy to keep up the struggle. They needed to take a break from the agitation and yet remain involved in the movement. The constructive work fulfilled this great need.

Yet another merit of constructive work was that it helped take the movement to illiterate masses, who constituted Gandhi's "steel frame" as it were. It was above all through Gandhi's constructive work that the national movement entered the villages. The rural component of the national movement was consolidated either by the peasant movements or by Gandhian constructive work. The peasant movements could not be sustained for long for obvious reasons. But the constructive programme could be taken up at any point and sustained for long durations. The constructive programme also helped enlarge the social base of the movement. A large number of people, who had no inclination for organised modern politics, and were also reluctant to go jail, could easily take up constructive work in the villages. So in a way the constructive programme enabled a large number of people to participate in the national movement, without necessarily paying a social cost for it.

The above description however is not meant to suggest that Gandhi's constructive programme had only an instrumental value, that it was only an instrument in the struggle against imperialism. It was an important activity in itself. Spinning provided an additional source of income for landless agricultural workers, most of whom came from lower castes. In order to regulate constructive work, Gandhi formed the All India Spinners' Association whose purpose was to create rural employment by insisting on the city people to use hand spun cloth only. The spinners association soon reached over five thousand villages and provided employment to over four lakh spinners and carders and over twenty thousand weavers. Within ten years of its formation it succeeded in disbursing over two crore rupees in those villages.

Quite apart from its economic viability, the village reconstruction had a great moral significance for Gandhi. For him the real India lived in its villages, not in the cities. Fully aware that Indian villages and villagers lived in pathetic conditions, Gandhi suggested: "If India lives in the villages, let then there be at least one ideal village so that it may serve as a model to the whole of the country." Such a model of an ideal village actually existed in Gandhi's mind. In an interesting debate with Jawaharlal Nehru in 1945 on the future of independent India, Gandhi wrote: "The village of my dreams is still in my mind. After all every man lives in the world of his dreams. My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera, nor small-pox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour." (Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 5 October 1945). And after India's villages were fully developed along the lines suggested by Gandhi, there will be "no dearth in them of men with high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers. In short, there will be nothing in life worth having which will not be had in the villages."

In short then, the constructive programme was a multi-faceted phenomenon. It had a strategic, an economic and a moral dimension. It was an important component of Gandhi's strategy of struggle against imperialism in which phases of agitation alternated with phases of constructive programme and thus kept the movement going without any break. At the same time the work of Khadi also provided economic relief and sustenance to poor villagers. And finally it was also linked to Gandhi's vision of an ideal village life.

14.10 SUMMARY

This Unit tried to explain to you the political significance of Swaraj Party and its role in the national movement. The Swarajist experiment constituted a brief but important episode within nationalist politics. Its life-span occupied the period between two phases of agitational politics (1920-22 and 1930-34). The basic purpose of the Swarajist politics was to extend the national movement to the legislative arena. The idea was that the Swarajists should get into the councils and oppose the British rule from *within* the structures created by the British. The Swarajist leaders, Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, realised the importance of legislative politics and, instead of boycotting it, brought it within the nationalist fold. Swaraj Party contested the elections twice, in 1923 and 1926, and performed the role of nationalist opposition in the councils and the Assembly.

A high point of Swarajist politics was to deny the British government any moral legitimacy to make laws for Indians, and to insist that only Indians could make a Constitution for themselves. As a corollary of this, all the major political parties got together under Congress leadership and prepared the draft of a Constitution for India. This came to be known as Nehru Report. Nehru Report can be justifiably seen as a precursor to the Constitution of independent India that was inaugurated in 1950.

With the making of the Nehru Report, the Swarajist activities came to an end. With the arrival of Simon Commission, the political climate suddenly changed in favour of agitational politics. With that the separate existence of Swaraj Party came to an end and the party merged into Congress. But it is important to remember that in the 1930s, the legislative politics became an important plank of Congress politics. In 1937 Congress contested elections to central and provincial assemblies and formed government in seven out of 11 provinces, under the GOI Act of 1935.

The Unit also focused on the essence of Gandhi' constructive programme. With the withdrawal of non-cooperation after mob violence at Chauri Chaura, the national movement got diverted into multiple channels. At one end was the politics of 'constitutional opposition' practiced by the Swarajists. At the other end were the violent revolutionary activities in Punjab, UP and Bengal. However a significant space in the nationalist spectrum was occupied by Gandhi's constructive programme. It consisted of promotion of Khadi, spinning, village industries, national education and Hindu-Muslim unity, struggle against untouchability and social uplift of the lower castes, and boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. With the constructive programme, the national movement made its big entry into India's villages. The significance of the constructive programme was three-fold. It was an important component of the strategy of the national movement, in which phases of agitational politics were alternated with those of constructive work. This gave the movement breathing space and allowed people to renew their energies. Apart from the strategic significance, the constructive programme had an economic dimension also. It provided an alternative source of employment to poor villagers who could substitute their incomes by taking to Khadi work. Under the leadership of All India Spinners Association (AISA), the Khadi programme reached nearly five thousand villages and improved the conditions of a large number of villagers. But for Gandhi, the significance of village reconstruction lay much deeper. Gandhi saw the programme as the key to the transformation of India's villages. For Gandhi the villages were the repository of a superior moral life and an effective answer to the distortions that had crept into human life as a result of excessive industrialisation. In other words village reconstruction was linked to Gandhi's vision of an ideal village life. An ideal village life was Gandhi's answer to a centralised, aggressive and coercive modernity. In this sense the significance of Gandhi's constructive programme went well beyond the anti-imperialist nationalist struggle.

14.11 EXERCISES

1) What was the background to the formation of Swaraj Party?

2) What was the essence of Swarajism as a political idea?

3) How did Swaraj Party contribute to the growth of the national movement?

4) What was the essence of Gandhi's constructive programme?

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Block

4

NATIONAL MOVEMENT – THE MASS PHASE-II

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BLOCK 4 NATIONAL MOVEMENT – THE MASS PHASE-II

A new phase of nationalist mass mobilisation began in the late 1920s with the arrival of the all-White Simon Commission in 1927 without any representation of the Indians. It was, therefore, boycotted by the Congress, and people all over the country protested against it. Anti-imperialist sentiments intensified in the subsequent period with urban crowds participating in various demonstrations and protests. Working-class militancy also increased significantly with the Bombay textile workers effecting one of the longest industrial strikes lasting for about six months. A radical shift was noticeable within the Congress also resulting in the declaration of the demand for complete independence in 1929. The situation seemed quite ripe for another phase of mass struggle. The Civil Disobedience Movement was launched when Gandhiji, along with a group of chosen volunteers, began the Dandi March to break the Salt Law. Following him, people all over the country broke salt laws and courted arrests. Besides breaking of the salt laws, no-tax and no-revenue campaigns were also launched in certain areas. There was also defiance of the forest laws which prohibited the use of forests by the locals. Noticing the gravity of the situation, the British government called a Round Table Conference and invited the Congress for talk. Gandhiji represented the Congress and the movement was temporarily withdrawn to facilitate the talk. However, the talk proved to be a failure due the divisive policies of the colonial rulers. This led to the resumption of the movement which, however, failed to acquire its earlier intensity. All these developments have been discussed in **Unit 15**.

Unit 16 discusses the constitutional developments during this period culminating in the Government of India Act, 1935 which allowed substantial autonomy to the provinces. The resentment against the insufficiency of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms prompted the British Indian government to institute the Simon Commission in 1927. All the members of the Commission were Whites and no Indian was represented on its board. This led to its boycott by the Congress. The arrival of the Commission in India in early 1928 was greeted with massive protests and demonstrations wherever it went. The recommendations of the Commission were also rejected by the Congress which presented its alternative model in the Nehru Report. It demanded a dominion status for India with fully responsible government and a strong Indian-controlled centre. The Congress gave ultimatum to the colonial government to accept the Nehru Report or face another mass movement. It was, however, not accepted by the government and rejected by Muslim League. It was also questioned by the radicals within the Congress who pitched for complete independence. Ultimately the goal for the Congress-led nationalist movement was declared to be complete independence in 1929. Meanwhile, the British government parleyed with loyalist non-Congress organisations to frame constitution for India through a Round Table Conference in 1930-31. However, without the participation of the Congress it did not succeed. Congress participated in the next Round Table Conference in 1931, but it did not succeed in getting its views accepted. The grant of communal award offering separate electorate on caste basis was rejected by Gandhi who went on indefinite fast. The subsequent Poona Pact modified this aspect of the communal award. Finally, the Government of India Act, 1935 was passed by the British Parliament.

It kept the colonial structure intact maintaining the supremacy of the British in Indian affairs. However, it granted large provincial autonomy and substantially extended the electorate. Despite disagreeing with various provisions of the Act, the Congress decided to participate in subsequent elections which led to the formation of Congress ministries in various provinces.

The Congress succeeded tremendously well in certain provinces such as Madras, U.P., Bihar, Orissa and Central Provinces. It did reasonably well in Bombay and Assam. However, it failed in Bengal, Sindh and Punjab. In terms of reserved seats, its failure was very obvious, though its huge success in general seats was quite evident. It formed governments in several provinces. The Congress governments undertook various steps to address the problems of the people. Political prisoners were released and civil liberties were granted to the people, peasants' grievances were redressed in several provinces, certain labour laws were enacted to give relief to the workers particularly in Bombay, and various constructive programmes such as promotion of village industries and education were undertaken to help people. However, the Congress ministries resigned in 1939 in protest against the inclusion of India in World War without consulting the Indians. All these developments are discussed in detail in **Unit 17**.

Various ideologies and approaches, ranging from the right to the left, were represented in the nationalist movement. Even within the Congress, sharp differences of opinion on different issues surfaced time and again. The Gandhian core was surrounded by left-leaning leaders such as Nehru, Bose, Narendra Dev and Jayprakash Narayan, by right-wing leaders such as Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad, and by liberals such as Tej Bahadur Sapru, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and C. H. Setalvad. Then there were revolutionary militants inspired by Marxism and other ideologies. Besides, the communists were also making their presence felt particularly in labour movement. All these trends within the nationalist ideological spectrum have been discussed in **Unit 18**.

Finally, in **Unit 19**, you will learn about the processes of political democratisation in the princely states which covered about two-fifth of the area of Indian subcontinent and which had about one-third of the population of the British India. These states were ruled by autocratic princes under the watchful paramountcy of the British. The exploitation and oppression of the subject population in these states were quite intense, while they had no representative forum to express their grievances. Even in some rare instances where there were representative assemblies, their scope was extremely restricted. The partial democratisation in princely states occurred it various stages, but its extent remained rather limited.

UNIT 15 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT*

Structure

15.1 Introduction

15.2 Background

15.3 The Lahore Session

15.4 Spread of the Movement: Popular Response and Regional Pattern

15.5 Social Base of the Movement

15.6 Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the Second Round Table Conference

15.7 Back to Agitation

15.8 Critical Assessment of the Civil Disobedience Movement

15.9 Summary

15.10 Exercises

15.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at critically analysing and locating the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34) and evaluating its significance in the context of the broader anti-imperialist movement coordinated under the leadership of Gandhi since 1920s in India. The Civil Disobedience Movement, considered as the second major Gandhian mass movement, popularly labelled as the Salt Satyagraha, made a distinct advance in broadening the social reach of the anti-imperialist struggle compared to the Non-cooperation Movement, launched during the early 1920s. In this Unit, we shall discuss the backdrop under which the movement was launched, the issues addressed in its programme, the pattern and trend of popular response at various regional levels and thereby mapping its achievements and limitations.

15.2 BACKGROUND

The Indian National Congress suffered a sharp decline in its membership soon after the suspension of Non-cooperation Movement by Gandhiji in 1922. It also made a large section of the people feel let down and demoralized. Many in the Congress lost faith in the efficacy of the Gandhian strategy and a section of the youth turned to revolutionary violence to achieve their political objectives. The 'No-changer' group focused on the Gandhian constructive programme in rural areas whereas the 'Pro-changers', especially the Swarajists, got involved in council politics. Significantly, the mid-1920s also witnessed the alienation of the Muslims from the national movement and the resultant occurrence of communal riots at several places, such as Calcutta, Dacca, Patna, Delhi, United Provinces and the North Western Frontier Province. The perceptible demoralisation within the anti-imperialist movement however sought to be overcome with the revival of momentum for evocative nationalist politics around 1927.

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The immediate cause was the announcement and formation of an all-White Simon Commission in November 1927, tasked with the responsibility to decide and recommend whether India was ready for further measure of constitutional progress or not. Being an emotive issue, this radically affected the political mood of the country. The Commission had already become a suspect in the eyes of the people by not representing a single Indian and this had the opposite effect to the one intended. Therefore its arrival in India during February 1927 proved to be a political disaster. It was subjected to hostile demonstrations and boycotts, wherever Congress influence was strong enough.

This period also saw the Hindu-Muslim chasm grow as the Hindu critics of nationalism's espousal of Khilafat on the one hand, and the Muslim leaders' outcry against the alleged betrayal of the same Khilafat, on the other, undermined the platform of communal unity which the Non-Cooperation Movement in early 1920s had so splendidly built up.

The anti-Simon boycotts heralded the revival of anti-imperialistic movements from 1928 onwards. Middle-class students and youth dominated the urban demonstrations during the years 1928 and 1929. This period also witnessed student and youth conferences and associations, raising demands for complete independence and socio-economic change. Bombay and Calcutta witnessed militant communist-led workers movement, which alarmed Indian businessmen and British officials alike. Bhagat Singh's Hindustan Socialist Republican Association introduced a new secular and socialistic tone, leading to a revival of revolutionary groups in Bengal and Northern India. Added to these developments, Vallabhbhai Patel's Bardoli Satyagraha in Gujarat in 1928 against the enhancement of land revenue spawned peasant movements in various regions. This was also the time when Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, strongly influenced by socialist ideas and a politically restive population, raised the demand for Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence replacing the usual demand for Dominion status. Simultaneously the rise and impact of left wingers within the Congress led Gandhiji to support the demand for complete independence at Lahore session of the Congress in 1929.

In the meantime, the popular resentment against Simon Commission made it apparent that the future constitution of India should be framed by the Indians themselves. The Congress convened an all-party conference in February 1928 and constituted a committee to draft a constitution under Motilal Nehru in May 1928. In fact, the Nehru Committee was the nationalists' response to the appointment of Simon Commission. Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State, had challenged the Indians asking them to frame a constitution acceptable to all political groups in the country. The Indian opinion on this vital issue was united. The Nehru Committee Report suggested a constitution based on the principles of dominion status. The Congress, which met in December 1928, declared that if the British government did not accept the Nehru Report by the end of 1929, it would give a call for a new civil disobedience campaign at its next session to be held at Lahore.

Another development that had far-reaching effects on the national movement was the World Economic Depression of 1929-33. Political and economic tensions steadily aggravated under the British colonial setup as it failed to accommodate emerging Indian interests during the late 1920s and early 1930s. British tariff

policy was lopsided and led to large scale discontent amongst the various business groups. Textile imports from Lancashire increased the anxiety and concerns of the local manufacturers; the British jute interests and the Birlas were at loggerheads in Calcutta; while in Bombay coastal shipping was a source of friction. Large scale retrenchment of the workers spawned agitations with unprecedented virulence and organisation.

15.3 THE LAHORE SESSION

The launch of a programme of civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes was the tactic the Congress authorized at the Lahore session in 1929 along with a request to all members of legislatures to resign their seats. Although Gandhi was empowered to launch the agitation at a time and place of his choice, he was desperately in search of an effective formula. He submitted a minimum demand of 11 points among which the major ones were: the demand for the reduction of rupee-sterling ratio to 1s4d, reduction of agricultural tax by 50% and making it a subject of legislative control, abolition of salt tax and salt monopoly of the government, reduction of military expenditure and salaries of highest grade services, release of all political prisoners, protection for Indian textiles and reservation of costal shipping for Indians and so on. The demands were ignored. Jawaharlal Nehru regarded these demands as 'a climb down from *Purna Swaraj*' and Gandhi was still in two minds.

It was in February 1930 that Gandhi began to talk about salt: 'There is no article like salt outside water by taxing which the State can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhuman poll tax the ingenuity of man can devise.' He informed the Viceroy Irwin that on the 11th of March he would proceed with the co-workers of his Ashram at Sabarmati to violate the salt law. It was a brilliantly conceived plan though a few could grasp its significance when it was announced. With seventy-eight members, among whom were men belonging to almost every region and religion of India, Gandhi decided to march from Ahmedabad to Dandi through the villages of Gujarat for about 240 miles. He declared that upon reaching the Dandi coast, he would break the salt laws. It was, as turned out later, a deceptively innocuous and devastatingly effective move. As people began to converge at Sabarmati Ashram in thousands, before the movement began, to witness the dramatic events that would unfold. Gandhiji painstakingly explained his plans, gave directions for future actions, impressed on the people about the necessity for non-violence and prepared them for the Government's response. Gandhiji said 'Wherever possible, civil disobedience of salt laws should be started… Liquor and foreign cloth shops should be picketed. We can refuse to pay taxes if we have requisite strength. The lawyers can give up practice; the public can boycott the courts by refraining from litigation. Government servants can resign their posts… I prescribe only one condition, viz., let our pledge for truth and non-violence as the only means for the attainment of Swaraj be faithfully kept.'

The proposal of making the issue of salt central to the launching a mass civil disobedience movement proved quite decisive. 'You planned a fine strategy round the issue of salt', Irwin told Gandhi later. A concrete and universal grievance of the rural poor, the salt laws had no socially divisive implications. The breaking of the salt law by Gandhi meant a rejection of the government's claim on the allegiance of the people. Furthermore, in coastal areas, illegal manufacture of

salt could provide the people with a small income which was no less significant. Above everything, the Dandi March and the widespread violation of the salt laws over large areas of the country subsequently demonstrated the tremendous power of a non-violent mass struggle. While Gandhi was marching to Dandi his comrades took up the far more difficult task of organisation, fund collection and touring towns and villages to spread the nationalistic message among the people.

15.4 SPREAD OF THE MOVEMENT: POPULAR RESPONSE AND REGIONAL PATTERN

Once the way was cleared by Gandhi's extraordinary political ritual at Dandi, defiance of the salt laws started all over the country. The Satyagrahis held salt marches in Assam, Bengal, and Madras, Sindh, Orissa and at many other places. In Tamil Nadu, C. Rajagopalchari led a march from Tiruchirapally to Vedaranniyam. In Malabar, K. Kelappan led a march from Calicut to Poyannur. Noted Gandhian leader Gopabandhu Choudhury led the first batch of Satyagrahis from Cuttack to Inchudi in Balasore sea-coast in Orissa. In Assam, Satyagrahis walked from Sylhet to Noakhali (Bengal) to make salt. In Andhra, a number of Sibirams (camps) came up in different districts as headquarters of salt Satyagraha.

This period also witnessed a new kind of no tax campaign – the refusal to pay the chowkidari tax. The chowkidars as village guards, supplemented the small contingent of rural police, were paid out of the tax levied specially on the villages. The popular antipathy for chowkidars had continued as they were often perceived as spies acting in favour of the Government and also as retainers for the local landlords. The movement against this tax, calling for the resignation of chowkidars, and of the influential members of chowkidari panchayats first started in Bihar in May 1930, in lieu of salt agitation due to the land-locked nature of the province. The tax was refused in the Monghyr, Saran and Bhagalpur districts: 'Chowkidars were induced to resign, and a social boycott used against those who resisted. The Government retaliated by confiscation of property worth hundreds and thousands in lieu of a few rupees of tax and by beatings and torture. Matters came to a head in Bihpur in Bhagalpur on May 31 when the police, desperate to assert its fast-eroding authority, occupied the Congress ashram which was the headquarters of nationalist activity in the area. The occupation triggered off daily demonstrations outside the ashram. The visit by Rajendra Prasad and Abdul Bari from Patna became the occasion for a huge mass rally, which was broken up by a lathi charge injuring Rajendra Prasad. As elsewhere, repression further increased the nationalist' strength and prevented the police from entering the rural areas.'

In Bengal, as salt manufacturing became difficult with the onset of the monsoon, the shift to anti-chowkidari and anti-Union Board agitation emerged as distinct options. As in other places, villagers here braved and 'withstood severe repression, losing thousands of rupees worth of property through confiscation and destruction, and having to hide for days in forests to escape the wrath of the police.' The non-payment of chowkidari tax and demand for its abolition marked a new high in coastal districts of Orissa particularly in Balasore with the petering out of salt Satyagraha around June in view of advent of rains. People refused to pay the tax under the belief that the very payment of tax had been 'forbidden by the Congress people'. Collective forms of protest as well as assault on police surfaced when

the authorities attempted to attach the property of the people who refused to pay chowkidari tax.

No-tax movement in the shape of refusal of land revenue also surfaced in Kheda, Bardoli taluqa of Surat district, and Jambusar in Broach of Gujrat. It saw remarkable exodus of thousands of people, with family, cattle and household goods, from British India into the neighbouring princely states such as Baroda where they camped for months together in the open fields. On the other hand, the British authorities retaliated by breaking open their houses, destroying their belongings and confiscating their lands. The police did not even 'spare Vallabhbhai Patel's eighty-years-old mother, who sat cooking in her village house in Karamsad; her cooking utensils were kicked about and filled with kerosene and stone.' Vallabhbhai continued to provide encouragement and solace to the hard-pressed peasants of his native land. In the face of terrible oddities compounded by meagre resources and demoralisation, 'they stuck it out in the wilderness till the truce in March 1931 made it possible for them to return to their respective homes.'

Forest laws were defied and it assumed mass proportions in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Central Provinces, 'especially in areas with large tribal populations who had been the most seriously affected by the colonial Government's restrictions on the use of the forest.' At some places, the size of the crowd that broke the forest laws swelled to 70,000 and above. The infamous 'Cunningham circular' evoked powerful agitation led by students in Assam. The circular unjustly had forced students and their guardians to furnish assurances of good behaviour to the colonial government.

The popular response all over the country to Jawaharlal Nehru's message delivered at Lahore in December 1929 has been ecstatic. Nehru had reminded his countrymen: 'Remember once again, now that this flag is unfurled, it must not be lowered as long as a single Indian, man, woman, or child lives in India.' It is in this context, 'attempts to defend the honour of the national flag in the face of severe brutalities often turned into heroism of the most spectacular variety.' The exemplary courage of Tota Narasaiah Naidu who preferred to be beaten unconscious by a fifteen-member police force rather than give up the national flag at Bundur, on the Andhra Coast had an electrifying effect all over the country. This was followed with similar determination displayed by P. Krishna Pillai, a Calicut based nationalist who later on became a prominent communist, in suffering lathi blows. In a novel idea of defying the repeated attempts by police to snatch away the national flag from their hands, a group of children in Surat would stitch khadi dresses in the three colours of the national flag, and thus these little, 'living flags' triumphantly paraded the streets and made the police utterly helpless to snatch the national flag anymore. The national flag which came to be spotted in the nook and corner of the rural India now onward came to symbolise the unprecedented sprit of nationalism.

The Civil Disobedience Movement evoked remarkable response in the initial months in U.P., but got quietened as colonial repression stepped up. But it led to the call for a movement combining both no-revenue, no-rent campaign. The no-revenue part was a call to the zamindars to refuse to pay revenue to the Government, the no-rent a call to the tenants not to pay rent to the zamindars. As the zamindars were largely loyal to the Government, this became primarily a no-rent struggle. Though no-rent was in the air, it was only in October the

campaign picked up again when Jawaharlal Nehru, 'out of jail for a brief period, got the U.P. Congress Committee to sanction the no-rent campaign'. Based on intensive propaganda for two months, the campaign came to be launched in December; by January however, severe repression had forced many peasants to flee the villages. The two districts of Agra and Rae Bareli remained the nerve centres of this campaign.

A variety of forms of mobilization came to be popularized as Civil Disobedience Movement crystallized as a major nationalist form of anti-colonial politics. For instance, formation of volunteer corps, organisation of *sankirtan* processions to move around towns and villages to popularise the message of swaraj or *prabhat pheris*, wherein people including women and children in the villages and towns went around at dawn singing nationalist songs, tours by activists and leaders organizing public meetings in the rural and urban areas, organisation of magic lanterns shows and secret circulation of booklets containing nationalist literature in the villages to spread nationalist ideas amongst people and setting up of underground Congress ashrams became the familiar modes of nationalist activities. Interestingly, rural market places, temples and Gandhian ashrams became significantly new sites of nationalist activities. Besides, widespread circulation of 'illegal' news-sheets or 'congress bulletins' or *patrikas* either handwritten or cyclostyled even sometimes by 'mango sellers and girl inmates of orphanage' not only sought to contest the legitimacy of obnoxious Press Act but also emerged as the innovative ways of mobilizing people. Children volunteered to organise them into *vanara sena* or monkey squads and 'at least at one place the girls decided they wanted their own separate *manjari sena* or cat army!'

Nehru's arrest in April 1930 for defiance of the salt law evoked huge demonstrations in Madras, Calcutta and Karachi. Gandhi's arrest came on May 4, 1930 when he had announced that he would lead a raid on Dharsana salt works on the west coast. Gandhi's arrest was followed by massive protests in Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Sholapur, where the response was the fiercest. After Gandhi's arrest, the Congress Working Committee sanctioned three significant measures: (i) Non-payment of revenue in Ryotwari areas; (ii) No-chowkidari-tax campaign in Zamindari areas; and (iii) Violation of forest laws in the central provinces.

Under pressure and social boycott, many lower-level government officials including police men resigned from their services. As the agitation gathered momentum, the government, in retaliation, let loose a reign of brutality, methodically bashing unresisting men to a bloody pulp, as the American journalist Webb Miller observed. Such repression and its heroic defiance evoked admiration and sympathy which quickly turned into active participation, releasing the movement from its initially narrow confines. But then the movement turned violent, weakening the Gandhian restraint because his followers were already behind the bars.

When the Salt Satyagraha attained a critical high, three major developments occurred which went beyond the confines of Gandhian Civil Disobedience. Firstly, Revolutionary nationalism in Bengal considerably deepened British alarm. For example, the Chittagong armoury was captured by the Bengal revolutionaries on April 18, 1930 after which they fought a pitched battle on Jalalabad hill on April 22. Civil disobedience in Bengal was accompanied by revolutionary nationalism,

with 56 incidents in 1930 (as compared to 47 in 1919-29). Secondly, in Peshawar, the arrest of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan on April 23, 1930 gave rise to a massive upsurge when Hindu soldiers refused to open fire on a Muslim crowd in a fine instance of patriotic self-sacrifice, non-violence and communal amity. Thirdly, a textile workers' strike in Sholapur led to attacks on liquor shops, police outposts and government buildings, giving rise to something like a parallel government for a few days in early May. However, illegal salt manufacture became difficult due to the onset of monsoon, and the Congress took to other forms of mass struggle like non-payment of land revenue, refusal to pay *chowkidari tax* and Satyagraha in forest areas. Though the government retaliated with force, the peasants held firm and resorted to violent confrontations with the police in many places.

However, some regional studies on the Civil Disobedience Movement reveals that Gujarat and the Gujarati business-cum-professional community of Bombay city became the classic heartland of Gandhian controlled mass mobilization through Satyagraha. The interests of substantial landholding peasants like the Patidars of Bardoli and Kheda fitted in well with Gandhian strategies and controls, because rent was not much of an issue. In the areas where the Congress was weaker or where internal zamindar-peasant divide was quite pronounced, rural movements tended to be much more uninhibited. This was seen in Central Provinces, Maharashtra or Karnataka, where non-cooperation had little impact and Gandhian ideas came to be associated with a near millenarian flavor and novelty, mostly absent in the well-established strongholds like Gujarat, coastal Andhra or Bihar. This inverse relationship between organization and militancy had been brought out in district-level comparisons in U.P. A strong organisation and a few big zamindars in parts of Agra district followed the Bardoli pattern, while in taluqdar-dominated Rae Baraeli, peasants' exerted pressure. In Bengal, the Congress was weak and faction-ridden, there was a communal divide in the eastern districts and the presence of a left alternative made matters complicated.

15.5 SOCIAL BASE OF THE MOVEMENT

In the urban areas, the support for Gandhian nationalism around 1930 was less than what it had been during the Non-Cooperation Movement and only a few lawyers gave up their practice and a few students joined 'national schools' instead of government controlled institutions. Revolutionary nationalism attracted the educated youth more in Bengal, and for a brief period Bhagat Singh became more popular than Gandhi in the north Indian towns. Muslim participation was low, and there was communal discontent in Dhaka town and Kishoreganj village in May and July 1930. There were frequent hartals in towns, but to the relief of British officials the Congress did not include industrial or communication strikes in its programme. That lacuna was largely made up by the massive peasant mobilization and considerable support from the business groups, at least during the initial stages. As the movement implied violations of law, the number of jail-goers was more than three times the 1921-22 figures. There was solidarity with the nationalist movement by the Calcutta Marwaris headed by G.D. Birla at this stage, and merchants in many towns gave up imports of foreign goods for some months. Due to picketing and the overall impact of the Depression worldwide, there was a spectacular collapse of British cloth imports from 1248 million yards in 1929-30 to only 523 million yard in 1930-31.

Another important feature of the Civil disobedience Movement was the widespread participation of women. Women from socially conservative professional, business or peasant families picketed shops, faced lathis and went to jail. This, however, did not entail any drastic change in the traditional image of women. But women's participation in revolutionary nationalism, especially in Bengal, did come under sharp attack. Even Rabindranath Tagore with his impeccable progressive outlook wrote a novel *Char Adhyay* criticizing such 'unfeminine' behaviour.

15.6 GANDHI-IRWIN PACT AND THE SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

Civil Disobedience passed on to an apparently contradictory phase in the last few months of 1930. The effect of the Depression increased the pressures for no rent, which the UP Congress reluctantly sanctioned. Though incidents of peasant and tribal militancy increased, official reports indicated a marked decline of enthusiasm and support among urban traders, many of whom started selling foreign goods on the sly. Industrialists grumbled about the limits of patience while Homi Mody complained of the frequent hartals dislocating trade and industry. The ruthless seizure of property by the government reduced the nationalistic ardour of the rich peasants. Gandhi had to retreat probably due to all this as also owing to the fact that almost all leading congress leaders were in jail. He had a talk with Irwin, ending in the Delhi Pact or Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 5 1931. The pact proposed another round table conference to discuss the agreements reached in the first; the immediate withdrawal of Civil Disobedience; the discontinuation of boycott of British goods; the withdrawal of ordinances promulgated, release of prisoners and remission of penalties; and with the exception of people living by the seashore, no breach of the salt law. There was feeling of unhappiness all over, more so when Gandhi's request was ignored and three revolutionaries – Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru – were executed on March 23. Nehru wrote that Civil Disobedience had died, 'not with a bang but a whimper'. People felt let down, especially the peasants who had sacrificed their land.

The compromise in the form of Gandhi-Irwin pact has been a subject of debate among some historians. R.J. Moore who first pointed out that bourgeois pressure was a significant factor behind the compromise, a point which Sumit Sarkar developed later to argue that the Indian bourgeoisie played a 'crucial' role both in the initial success of the movement as well as in its subsequent withdrawal. This position has also been accepted by other historians across the ideological spectrum like Judith Brown, Claude Markovits and Basudev Chaterjee. It is argued that the alliance between the Congress and the capitalists was uneasy and vulnerable from the very beginning and now uncontrolled mass movement unnerved the business classes who wanted to give peace a chance. Hence, the pressure was on Gandhi to return to constitutional politics which ultimately resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin pact. But the problem with this thesis is that the business groups hardly represented a homogeneous class in 1931 and did not speak with one voice. As A.D.D. Gordon puts it, the enthusiasm of the industrialists was dampened by the Depression, boycott, hartals and the social disruption, and they wanted either to destroy Civil disobedience or broker a peace between Congress and the Government. But on the other hand, the marketers and the traders still remained staunch supporters of Gandhi, and their

radicalism even increased as Civil disobedience made progress. More significantly, as other critics of this theory point out, although business community supported the movement and could partly claim credit for its early success, they were never in a position to pressurise Gandhi to withdraw the movement. Gandhian Congress was projecting itself as an umbrella organisation, which would incorporate all the different classes and communities. So it was highly unlikely that Gandhi would take such a vital decision only to satisfy the interests of one particular class. However, it is important to remember that the CDM had helped to the growing radicalisation of certain lower classes that often refused to remain under the official control of local congress leaders. Against this larger backdrop, Gandhi had assessed the appropriateness of suspending the movement by agreeing to effect an understanding with Irwin lest the movement should turn violent and thereby spark off colonial repression. But by then the movement had registered remarkable success in terms of moral-ideological victory over the enemy!

The Second Round Table Conference (September-December 1931) proved to be a fiasco with Gandhi squabbling endlessly with Ambedkar and Muslim leaders who had asked for separate electorates, which the British watched with unconcealed glee. The session was a pointless exercise primarily because Gandhi had given up during the Delhi negotiations the demand for majority representation for his party which had led to the rejection of Irwin's offer in December 1929.

15.7 BACK TO AGITATION

The failure of the Second Round Table Conference and the empty-handed return of Gandhiji from it resulted in the resumption of the Civil Disobedience Movement in early 1932. Despite severe repressive measures taken by the British Government to crush the agitation, the movement continued with vigour for about a year and half. In April 1932, Lord Wellingdon described Bengal and Bombay as the 'two black spots'. In Bengal militant activities increased with vigour along sporadic agrarian unrest. The popular response to Gandhi-Irwin pact in Orissa was remarkably celebratory: the pact was seen as victory for Gandhi and the Congress as well as people in general in many parts of the province. It was this sense of victory that scored against the British rule and emboldened the people to carry forward the struggle in the face of repression and arrest of leaders in the 1932-34 phase. Local-level leaders and Satyagrahis in the coastal Orissa during this phase, tried out diverse and innovative methods of struggle to keep up the movement. These methods included resistance to the police, rescue of arrested Satyagrahis, recapture of the already-seized Congress ashrams (sometimes by women volunteers) and the attempt to sell contraband salt in the court premises.

Attempts at attacking colonial symbols, such as tearing off the uniforms of the policemen and chowkidars, damaging of postboxes and disruption of court proceedings during revenue sales also surfaced. The small traders of Gujarat strongly supported the Congress. However, in rural areas, the movement evoked less enthusiasm than it was in the earlier phase. The rich peasants groups, who had showed greater militancy during the first phase of the Movement (1930-32) felt betrayed by the movement's withdrawal and remained unstirred in many places, such as Coastal Andhra, Gujarat or UP, when the Congress leaders wanted to mobilise them the second time. Some aspects of the Gandhian social

programme such as his crusade against untouchability simply did not appeal to them belonging mostly to the higher caste, and even above hostile response. On the other hand, Gandhiji's Harijan campaign failed to impress the Harijans themselves. In Marathi-speaking Nagpur and Berar, which had been the strongholds of Ambedkar's Dalit (Untouchable) politics, the Untouchables refused to switch their allegiance to the Congress.

In the urban areas, the relationship between the business groups and the Congress was marked by a certain degree of ambivalence. There was an open estrangement between the Congress and Bombay Mill owners, who under the leadership of Homi Mody, asked Gandhiji not to resume the movement. The other sections of the Indian big business were also in a dilemma. As Claude Markovits argues, under the strain of this ambivalence, the unity of the Indian capitalist class broke down. By 1933, the weakening economy and growing violence even crushed the enthusiasm of the staunchest of Gandhian supporters – the Gujarati and Marwari merchants. The urban intelligentsia also felt less inclined to follow the Gandhian path since the picketing of shops was frequently punctuated by the use of bombs which Gandhi failed to stop. The labour remained apathetic and the Muslims often antagonistic. Severe Government repression led to the imprisonment of thousands of Congress volunteers. Under these circumstances, Gandhi who himself was in prison, decided to temporarily suspend the Movement in May1933. The movement was formally withdrawn in April 1934.

15.8 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

The Civil disobedience movement for the Congress was by no means a failure. By 1934, the Congress had mobilised great political support and gained a moral authority, which were converted into a massive electoral victory in 1937. Though the Congress was forced to withdraw the movement, its prestige among the masses remained high. In fact, the vertical and horizontal reach of Congress had grown stronger in 1930s as compared to its position in early 1920s.

From the logic of Civil disobedience itself, many left alternatives emerged which emphasised the need for combining nationalism with radical social and economic programmes. Hereafter, the Congress drifted towards greater radicalisation. For example, the land reforms directed towards curbing and eventually abolishing Zamindari were coming to be included in the official Congress programme by the mid-1930s, in total contrast to its earlier pronouncements. This shift in the orientation of the Congress was earlier indicated in the Karachi Resolution (1931) on Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy that came just after the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

Though some scholars opine that Gandhi's decision to suspend the civil disobedience movement as agreed under the Gandhi-Irwin pact was a retreat, it was not really so. The move was warranted due to some practical reasons. Firstly, it is important to understand that mass movements are necessarily short lived and the capacity of the masses to make sacrifice unlike that of the activists is limited. Secondly, there were clear signs of exhaustions after September 1930 especially among shopkeepers and merchants who had participated so enthusiastically. Besides, the sporadic incidents of anti-police resistance which

continued in Bengal, Bihar, Andhra, and Gujarat or the no-rent campaign which picked up in late 1930s should not be seen as a scenario indicating still a vibrant and energetic mood on the part of the masses all over the country to carry on further with the anti-colonial struggle when Gandhi decided to cry halt to the movement. Gandhi had realised that the 'vast reserves of energy' expected to flow into the movement were instead fast petering out. No wonder the colonial government ruthlessly suppressed the movement soon in 1932. It was against this backdrop, the viable option was to suspend the movement and consolidate whatever gains have been scored so far. In an anti-colonial mass movement what matters most is the 'moral-ideological' victory on the part of the colonised subjects and a resultant hegemonic weight *vis-à-vis* the colonial state.

It is also true that many Congress supporters on the whole, especially the youth were considerably disappointed. Peasants of Gujarat were disappointed because their lands were not restored immediately (they got back their lands during the rule of the subsequent Congress Ministry in the province). But vast masses of people were undoubtedly jubilant that the British Government had to regard their movement as significant and treat their leader as an equal thereby signing a pact with him. In fact, in many parts of the country the political prisoners were given a hero's welcome upon their release from jails.

15.9 SUMMARY

The Civil Disobedience movement was a milestone in India's struggle for independence. It was formally launched in 1930 with the Dandi March by Mahatma Gandhi and his followers. It immediately spread in most parts of the country. The colonial rulers responded by initiating severe police action and by imprisoning a large number of protesters. But they failed to suppress the movement. The movement was temporarily withdrawn in the wake of Gandhi-Irwin pact. However, after the failure of the Second Round Table Conference in 1932, the movement was resumed. It was finally fully withdrawn in 1934.

15.10 EXERCISES

1) What were the factors responsible for the launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement?

2) Describe the various activities undertaken during the course of the movement.

3) Analyse the successes and failures of the movement.

UNIT 16 CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS*

Structure

16.1 Introduction

16.2 Background

16.3 Simon Commission

16.4 All-Parties Conference and Nehru Report

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- 16.5.1 Muslim Reaction to Nehru Report
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- 16.7.1 Evaluation of the Act
- 16.7.2 The Long-term British Strategy

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16.9 Summary

16.10 Exercises

16.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit attempts to analyse the political developments between 1927 and 1935 from the visit of the Simon Commission to India to the passage of the Government of India Act, 1935. It shall also deal with the Nehru Committee report, which prepared a detailed constitutional scheme for India in reply to the challenge posed by Lord Birkenhead to Indians, asking them to frame a constitution acceptable to all political parties in India. This Challenge was accepted by the Congress and an All-Parties Conference was called at Delhi on February 28, 1928. As many as 29 organisations were represented.

16.2 BACKGROUND

The Congress declared that the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms (Government of India Act, 1919) was, 'inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing' and could not be workable in actual practice. The Congress asked the British to follow the principle of self- determination so as to establish a fully responsible government as soon as possible. Simultaneously, it resolved to work towards that objective. There were, however, many obstacles. Not long back, the Rowlatt Report led to the enactment of two unpopular bills despite stiff opposition. Gandhi's call for Satyagraha against the two iniquitous bills gave rise to *hartals* all over the country and civil disturbances in a number of places. The imposition of martial law in Punjab followed and climaxed into the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy (1919) where

* Resource Person: Prof. Chandi Prasad Nanda

General Dyer ordered machine gun fire on a peaceful and unarmed crowd, resulting in the death of 400 people, and injuring nearly 1,200. The Muslims were also restive at that time due to the humiliating treatment meted out to defeated Turkey (in the First World War) by the Allied Powers. They launched the Khilafat Movement which had the support of Gandhi. These developments did cause a fundamental shift in the policy of the Congress. It stated in 1921 that the 'object of the Indian national Congress is the attainment of *Swaraj* by all legitimate and peaceful means'. This was a clear shift in perspective. This would mean going beyond the confines of constitutional political discourse. It was a call for active pursuance of the concept of *Swaraj* through legitimate and peaceful means. In consequence, the Montford Reforms introduced earlier had no chance of success either. As the Congress 'attitude towards the Act of 1919 hardened, even the moderates among them who were ready to cooperate with the government found the conditions difficult to bear. This led to the formation of the Swaraj party (1923), notably by Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, with the explicit objective of 'wrecking the legislatures from within' by following a policy of 'uniform continuous and sustained obstruction with a view to making government through the Assembly and the Council impossible'. The tactics worked, and the hypocrisy behind the dyarchical scheme of government was exposed.

16.3 SIMON COMMISSION

The appointment of the Simon Commission in November 1927, two years before it was due, was an indirect admission by the government of the failure of its reforms. The reason put forward, however, was that unrest was mounting in India. But a private letter of Lord Birkenhead to the Viceroy, Lord Reading, stated that the Conservatives in power apprehended a Labour victory in next general elections in England and did not like to leave the announcement of the Commission to the successors. Furthermore, it was believed that such a move could be used as a bait to ensnare and thereby break the Swaraj Party. The Commission was to look 'into the working of the system of government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in British India and matters connected therewith' and to consider 'to what extent it is desirable to establish the principle of responsible government, or to extend, modify or restrict the degree of responsible government existing therein, including the question whether the establishment of Second Chambers of the local legislatures is or is not desirable'. The Commission was composed of seven members of the British Parliament, mostly white, which disappointed the Indian public and led to its total boycott by the Congress. The untenable excuse offered by the British was that, as their Parliament appointed the Commission, its members necessarily had to be from that body. The Commission faced black-flags demonstrations wherever it went in India and had to hear the slogan 'Simon Go Back'. Its offer to form a joint committee with the Central Assembly was also rejected unceremoniously.

The Simon Commission had stated that in order to cope with the diversity of the country the ultimate character of the Indian government had to be federal. It declared that the establishment of responsible government at the centre was to wait indefinitely, which obviously meant that it was to be established somewhere in the distant future. Its observations regarding Dominion status were not very clear. It recommended that a Greater India consisting of British India and the

Princely States as a federal association was to be established in the future but the clause of British Paramountcy (with Viceroy as the agent of Paramount power) was to remain. This was met with great opposition from many political parties, spearheaded by the Congress.

16.4 ALL-PARTIES CONFERENCE AND NEHRU REPORT

At the 1927 Madras Congress Session, a resolution boycotting the Simon Commission was passed. The Working Committee was authorized to prepare a constitution for India in consultation with other organisations. Congress representatives as well as representatives of other organisations such as Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, etc. met at a conference in February, 1928. This came to be known as the All Parties Conference. This Conference was presided over by Dr. M.A. Ansari. It was agreed that in framing the Constitution of India, the principle of full Dominion responsible self-government should be kept in mind. After two subsequent meetings of All-Parties, in Bombay and in Lucknow, the Constitution was ratified. It asked for full Dominion Status and had provisions for having responsible governments at Center as well as in the Provinces.

Responsibility of the Cabinets was to be joint or collective, a full-fledged federation for India was considered only as a possibility and defense budgets were subject to approval of the Central Legislature and included provisions for incorporating fundamental rights (nineteen fundamental rights were suggested for inclusion in the proposed statute), though moderately worded. A Supreme Court was to be established, to serve as the final court of appeal and all appeals to the Privy Council were to be stopped.

It also secured the rights of the Native Rulers on the condition that they must allow for establishment of responsible governments in the States. The Nehru report also recommended joint electorates with seats reserved for the minorities on population basis except in Bengal and Punjab. 'Full protection was afforded to the religious and cultural interests of the Muslims, and even new provinces on linguistic basis were to be created with a view to the planning of Muslim-majority provinces.

Therefore, in May 1928, a Committee was appointed with Motilal Nehru as president. The Nehru Committee appointed by the nationalists was a response to the appointment of Simon Commission and the challenge given by Lord Birkenhead thrown to Indians asking them to frame a Constitution on which the Indian opinion was united. At the Calcutta Congress session it was stated that the Report had contributed to a great extent in solving India's political and communal problems.

The committee's report was an outline draft of a constitution which was based on the principle of fully responsible government on the model of the Constitution of self-governing dominions. The establishment of full responsible government was not to be considered as a remote but as an immediate step. Apparently it was different from the principle of gradual advancement as envisaged by the Act of 1919. This draft is commonly known as the Nehru Committee report. It made the following recommendations:

i) India should have the same constitutional status in the British Empire as other dominions with parliament having powers to make laws and should be known as the Commonwealth of India.

ii) The Constitution should define citizenship and declare fundamental rights.

iii) The legislative powers should vest with the King and bicameral parliament, and bicameral parliament, and executive powers with the king exercisable by the Governor-General and the same provisions should be made for the establishment of responsible governments in provinces in respect of governors and executive councils.

iv) Hierarchy of courts with a Supreme Court as its apex appeal court be established.

16.5 MAIN FEATURES OF NEHRU REPORT

The report suggested that the Indian Parliament should consist of (a) the Senate elected for seven years, consisting of 200 members elected by the Provincial Councils; and (b) the House of Representatives with 500 members elected for five years through adult franchise. The Governor General (to be appointed by the British Government but paid out of Indian revenues) was to act on the advice of the Executive Council which was to be collectively responsible to the Parliament. The Provincial Councils were to be elected, on the basis of adult franchise, for five years and the Governor (to be appointed by the British Government) was to act on the advice of the Provincial Executive Council'.

The Nehru Report contained virtually no federal features. Despite the fact that federal principle was introduced in the composition of the senate, the provinces were not equally represented in it and thus the federal principle was not really put into practice. De-centralisation was carried to the same extent as in the Act of 1919. Residuary powers were vested in the centre. The position of Princely States in relation to Centre was not made clear. The Committee considered the establishment of a federal constitution but it did not take concrete steps to materialize it.

The importance of the Report lay in the fact that it was the first expression of the organised opinion of the majority of the Indian leadership on the communal problem. According to Coupland, 'it embodied the frankest attempt yet made by the Indians to face squarely the difficulties of communalism'. The Report stated that the only method of giving a feeling of security to the minority was to provide for safeguards and guarantees. The Committee in this respect made three distinct proposals:

i) The proposed Constitution should provide for liberty of conscience and religion.

ii) On the principle of self-determination the Muslim majority provinces should be given distinct politico-cultural identity i.e., Sind was to be separated from Bombay presidency and N.W.F.P. was to be given full provincial status.

iii) The principle of separate electorates should be rejected and all elections should be conducted on the basis of joint electorates subject to reservations of seats for Muslims at centre and in provinces where they were in a minority and for non-Muslims in N.W.F.P.

However a little later, the Committee made two additional recommendations relating to the communal problem. Communal representation was to be reconsidered after ten years and Baluchistan was to be given full provincial status.

16.5.1 Muslim Reaction to Nehru Report

At the All Parties Convention held in Calcutta in December 1928, M.A. Jinnah demanded one third representation for the Muslims in the Central Legislature. As this was not accepted, he joined the groups led by Agha Khan and Muhammed Shafi. An All India Muslim Conference was held in Delhi on 1 January, 1929 and it passed a resolution emphasising two principles:

i) The first principle was that since India was a vast country, with a lot of diversity it required a federal system of government in which the states would have complete autonomy and residuary powers.

ii) The second principle was that the system of separate electorates should continue as long as the rights and interests of Muslims were not safeguarded in the constitution.

In March 1929 Jinnah put forward before the Muslim League a detailed account of Muslim demands known as the 'Fourteen Points'. These demands suggested a total rejection of Nehru Report because of two reasons. Firstly a unitary Constitution was not acceptable because it would not ensure Muslim domination in any part of India. A federal Constitution consisting of a Centre with limited powers and autonomous Provinces with residuary powers would enable the Muslims to dominate in five provinces, namely NWFP, Baluchistan, Sind, Bengal and Punjab; and, secondly the solution to the communal problem as suggested by Nehru Committee was not acceptable to Muslims. Jinnah was categorical about the inclusion of separate electorates.

16.5.2 Nehru Report and the Native States

A complex problem which confronted the Nehru Committee was regarding the status of princely states. In 1927 the people of Princely states formed the State Peoples Conference with a view to introducing self-governing institutions. This move threatened the interests of princes who sought the help of British in this matter. The result was the appointment of a Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Harcourt Butler which laid stress on preservation of princely states through British Paramountcy. The Nehru Committee criticized the appointment of Butler Committee and stated that the rights and obligations of Paramountcy should be transferred to the government of Commonwealth of India and conflicts between Commonwealth of India and Indian states were to be referred to the Supreme Court.

16.5.3 Internal Opposition to Nehru Report

Within the Congress the younger section led by Jawaharlal Nehru and S.C. Bose criticized the Nehru Report because of its acceptance of dominion Status. They had already stated their inclination towards greater freedom and talking about dominion status was viewed as a limiting Constitutional exercise. This reaction by the younger section within the Congress forced leadership at the Calcutta Congress to pass a resolution that if the British government did not accept the

Nehru Report on or before 31 December, 1929, or spurned it before that date, the Congress would start another mass movement. Since Lord Irwin showed no signs of taking concrete steps in the direction of establishing full Dominion Self-Government, as he had announced in his declaration of 31 October 1929, the Congress declared on 31 December, 1929, that the Nehru Report had ceased to be valid.

16.5.4 Nehru Report's Acceptance

The All-Parties Conference subsequently accepted the report but did not include the three amendments Jinnah had suggested in the meeting. The Congress forwarded the report to the British and set a deadline of one year for its acceptance, failing which they would organise a non-violent campaign in 1930. Three months later the Muslim league rejected the report and came up with Jinnah's famous 'Fourteen Point', their minimum acceptable conditions for a political settlement. Meanwhile, Ramsay MacDonald of the Labour Party had become the Prime Minister of England under whose advice the Viceroy stated that 'it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as therein contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Statue. So there should be a Conference of the Indians and the British to consider the final proposals of the Simon Commission (in limbo at that time) before they were submitted to the Parliament in England.'

16.6 ROUND TABLE CONFERENCES

Not only did the proposed Round Table Conference have a limited purpose and scope, but the 'Dominion status' referred to as the subject matter was also capable of being interpreted differently. The Congress decided to boycott the Round Table Conference by declaring that the national aim was to attain complete independence and therefore it launched the Civil Disobedience Movement in March 1930.

Gandhi set out on his momentous march to Dandi to prepare salt from the sea accompanied by thousands of followers. There were numerous arrests, lathi-charges by the police (even on women and children), threats to newspapers and journals for publishing the details of such onslaughts on unarmed people, and enactment of a number of ordinances. The gap between the nationalists and the government appeared to be unbridgeable. Amidst such political turmoil the Round Table Conference was convened in London between November 16, 1930 and January 19, 1931.

As many Congress leaders were in jail, 'safe' representatives of other parties, communities and services were nominated by the government as the spokespeople of India. The three basic principles adopted in the conference were: (i) the form of the new government would be an all-India federation; (ii) the federal government, subject to certain conditions, would be answerable to the federal legislature; and (iii) the provinces would be autonomous. The Conference ended with the declaration of Ramsay MacDonald, '… responsibility for the Government of India should be placed upon legislature, Central and Provincial, with such provisions as may be considered necessary … and also with guarantees… required by minorities'.

To secure the participation of the Congress in the next Conference, the Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed in March 1931 leading to the release of all political prisoners. The Congress in turn terminated the Civil Disobedience Movement. As the sole representative of the Congress to the second Conference (September 1 to December 1, 1931), Gandhi gave wide space to Jinnah to solve the vexed communal problem. In the meantime, M.A. Jinnah, having received secret support from the Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare, became too inflexible in his demands, leaving Gandhi with no other option but to return to India without any results. Gandhi was arrested on reaching India. Citing the absence of an agreed settlement as a pretext, the British proceeded to adjudicate on the respective quantum of representation of different communities which led to the infamous 'Communal Award' of 1932.

Gandhi could possibly sense the British game plan of divisive politics. He went on a fast to stop this political fracture between 'Caste Hindus' and the 'Scheduled Castes'. The Poona Pact was signed somewhat modifying the 'Communal Award'. The Third Round Table Conference in London (November 17 to December 24, 1932) was attended by 46 delegates, very carefully invited by the Conservative government in Britain. In the Conference the reports of the Sub-Committees appointed during the Second Round Table Conference were heard and formed the basis of discussions. Some more details about the new constitution were settled. The Indian delegates tried to push through some progressive provisions, which were instantly put into the cold storage. Similarly the question of including a Bill of Rights for the citizens was shelved on flimsy excuses.

In March, 1933 the British Government came out with the White Paper containing the proposals, indicating the line on which the new constitution of India was to take shape. As expected the White Paper introduced some reactionary provisions like recommending the extension of the scope of separate electorates, a provision whereby the representative of the States were to be nominated by the Princes and the power to abolish the second Chambers in the Provinces was given to the Central Legislature. Later on this power was given to the British Parliament. Restrictions on the powers of the Federal Court were increased so as not to make it the final Court of Appeal. This process culminated in the Secretary of State for India placing a Bill in the British Parliament in February 1935, which, on being passed and receiving Royal accent, became the Government of India Act 1935.

16.7 GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT, 1935

The Government of India Act was passed by the British parliament in August 1935. Its main provisions were as follows.

i) **Supremacy of the British Parliament:** The Government of India Act, 1935 was passed without a Preamble. This allowed the Preamble of 1919 Act to continue unhindered. This meant that realisation of responsible government by successive stages was the goal, with British Parliament being the sole judge of the nature and time of each advance. All rights of amending, altering or repealing the Constitution of India remained vested with the British Parliament.

ii) **Provincial Autonomy:** The whole of the Provincial Executive was now made responsible to or removable by the legislative Assembly of the

Province. The difference between the reserved subjects and the transferred subjects was dropped. All Provincial subjects were placed under the charge of the popular ministries but the Governors still retained their imposing set of powers. This made the application of provincial autonomy incomplete.

iii) **Dyarchy at the Centre:** It was to comprise all British Indian Provinces, all chief commissioner's Provinces and Indian states. The federation's formation was conditional on the fulfillment of two conditions: (a) states with allotment of 521 seats in the proposed Council of States should agree to join the federation; (b) aggregate population of states in the above category should be 50 per cent of the total population of all Indian states. Since these conditions were not fulfilled the proposed federation never came up. The Central Government carried on up to 1946 as per the provisions of Government of India Act, 1919.

At the Federal Level: a) **Executive**: Governor-general was the pivot of the entire constitution. Subjects to be administered were divided into reserved and transferred subjects. Reserved Subjects- foreign affairs, defense, tribal areas and ecclesiastical affairs-were to be exclusively administered by the Governor-general on the advice of executive councilors. Executive councilors were not to be responsible to the central Legislature. These ministers were to be responsible to the federal legislature and were to resign on losing the confidence of the body. Governor-General could act in his individual judgment in the discharge of his special responsibilities for the security and tranquility of India; b) **Legislature:** The bicameral legislature was to have an upper house (Council of states) and a lower house (Federal Assembly). The council of states was to be a 260-member house, partly directly elected from British Indian provinces and partly (40 per cent) nominated by the Princes. The Federal assembly was to be a 375 members house partly indirectly elected from British Indian provinces and partly (one-third) nominated by the Princes. Oddly enough election to the council of states was direct and that to the Federal assembly, indirect. Council of state was to be a permanent body with one-third members retiring every third year. The duration of the assembly was to be 5 years. The three list for legislation purposes were to be federal provincial and concurrent. Members of federal assembly could move a vote of no confidence against ministers. Council of States could not move a vote of no confidence. The system of religion-based and class-based electorates was further extended. Governor-general had residuary powers. He could (a) restore cuts in grants (b) certify bills rejected by the legislature (c) issue ordinances and (d) exercise his veto. Eighty per cent of the budget was non-votable.

At the Provincial Level: Provincial autonomy replaced dyarchy. Provinces were granted autonomy and separate legal identity. They were freed from 'the superintendence, direction' of the secretary of state and Governor-General. Provinces hence forth derived their legal authority directly from the British Crown. They were given independent financial powers and resources. Provincial governments could borrow money on their own security.

a) **Executive:** Governor was to be the Crown nominee and representative to exercise authority on the king's behalf in a province. He was to have special powers regarding minorities, rights of civil servants, law and order, British business interests, partially excluded areas, princely states etc. They also had the power to take over and indefinitely run administration.

b) **Legislature:** Separate electorates based on communal award were to be made operational. All members were to be directly elected. Franchise was extended and women got the right on the same basic as men. Ministers were to administer all provincial subjects in a council of ministers headed by a Premier. The Provincial ministers were made answerable to and removable by the adverse vote of the legislature. The Provincial legislature could legislate on subjects in provincial and concurrent lists. Forty percent of the budget was still not votable .

Governor could (a) refuse assent to a bill, (b) promulgate ordinances, (c) enact Governor's acts

16.7.1 Evaluation of the Act

Numerous 'safeguards' and special responsibility of the Governor General worked as brakes in proper functioning of the act. In the Provinces the governor still had extensive powers. This Act enfranchised 14 per cent of British India population. However the extension of the system of communal electorates and representations of various interests promoted separatist tendencies which culminated in partition of India.

The Act provided a rigid constitution with no possibility of internal growth. Right of amendment was reserved with the British Parliament.

The Act of 1935 was based on two basic principles, namely, federation and parliamentary system. Although the federation principle was introduced with a built-in unitary bias yet the provinces were invested with a coordinate and not a subordinate authority. No doubt, the federal character was seriously distorted by the provisions of safeguards and special responsibility which gave extraordinary powers to the executive head at the centre and the provinces. An important point to be noted is that fully responsible government was not introduced at the centre. The provincial autonomy envisaged under the Act was also placed under serious limitations. The Dominion Status for India was still a distant dream. The incorporation of safeguards was a clever constitutional device to delay the introduction of a fully responsible government. Although these provisions were made for the transition period, the extent of the period of transition was not defined.

The Indian National Congress rejected the provision of safeguards and repudiated the idea of transition. It suspected that there were sinister motives behind them and they were found to have an adverse effect on the national movement.

16.7.2 The Long-term British Strategy

Political suppression could only be a short-term tactic. In the long run the strategy was to weaken the movement and integrate large segments of the movement into colonial, constitutional and administrative structure. It was hoped that these reforms would revive political standing of constitutionalist, liberals and moderates who had lost public support during the Civil Disobedience Movement. The Colonial State repression earlier and reforms now would convince a large section of Congressmen of the ineffectiveness of an extra-legal struggle. They British political establishment felt that once Congressmen had tasted power, they would be reluctant to go back to politics of sacrifice.

The Colonial State had planned that these reforms could be used to create dissensions within the Congress. The right-wing political groups were to be placated through constitutional concessions and radical leftists to be crushed through police measures. Provincial autonomy would create powerful provincial leaders who would gradually become autonomous centers of political power. Congress would thus be provincialised and its central leadership would get weakened.

16.8 NATIONALISTS' RESPONSE

The Act was criticized and rejected by the Congress on the ground that in formulating it the people of India were never consulted, and as such it did not represent their will. Congress charged the government of formulating the Act in such a way as to stall the introduction of responsible government and perpetuate their rule and exploit the Indian masses. In spite of its recognition of the aspirations of the Indians to have a responsible government, the Act of 1935 did not fulfill those aspirations. It did not concede the right to vote to all the adults. The property qualifications, the system of separate electorates, the provisions of safeguard were violative of democratic rights of the people. The Act was, therefore, denounced as undemocratic in spirit, offensive to people's sovereignty and institutionally unworkable. The Liberals criticized the Act but were willing to work the reforms as a step towards responsible government. The Muslim League also criticized the Act but was ready to give it a trial. On the whole the Congress condemned the Act but hesitated that they might be prepared to work the provincial part under protest. Thus, the Congress participated in the elections in 1937 and formed provincial ministries. However, the Congress demanded convening of a constituent assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise to frame a constitution for independent India.

16.9 SUMMARY

By the mid-1920s, it had become clear that the working of the Government of India Act of 1919 did not satisfy the Indians leading to resentment. Keeping this in mind, the British government appointed the Simon Commission to recommend framing of new constitutional provisions for India. however, since all the members of the Commission were Whites, this led a lot of resentment and protest in India against it. The various Round Table Conferences held in London were also did not provide satisfaction to the nationalists. Nevertheless, when the Government of India Act, 1935 became operative, the Congress decided to work it despite serious reservations.

16.10 EXERCISES

1) How did the Indian nationalists react to the formation of the Simon Commission?

2) Discuss the features of the Nehru Report.

3) Discuss the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935. Why did the Congress criticise it?

UNIT 17 CONGRESS MINISTRIES*

Structure

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17.7 Summary

17.8 Exercises

17.1 INTRODUCTION

The period between 1936 and 1939 was a period of political transformation for the Congress. It was when the Congress opted for constitutional politics suspending the path of agitation and confrontation. However, unlike the earlier Swarajist phase, its present aim was to give the constitutional methods a trial and the Congressmen worked for their success. There were many differences among the Congressmen regarding the constitutional method. In fact, every decision taken up by the Congress was strongly debated upon before its adoption. Though there was an agreement on the basic issue of fighting British imperialism, Congressmen disagreed on the methods to be adopted. It was during this period that the Left Wing was making its presence felt within the Congress. The Right Wing and the Left Wing discussed and debated on various issues. After a hectic debate the Congress decided to contest the elections in 1937 and was successful in forming governments in seven provinces.

The Congress ministries functioned for a little more than two years. They had to sort out a number of problems during their short tenure in the office. Different social classes had their own expectations from the Congress and accordingly their aspirations went up with the Congress coming into power. The Congress succeeded in implementing certain principles for which it stood. But there were other issue on which the Congress was divided from within. But although the

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Congress resigned office in September 1939, its 2 year period in office had been of great significance in the freedom struggle. In fact, this was made clear to the people of India that they can have their own Government

17.2 TOWARDS CONSTITUTIONALISM

After the failure of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the Second Round Table Conference, the Civil Disobedience Movement was resumed from 1932. But it did not evoke a similar response from the people as the earlier phase had done. It was becoming clear that the renewed mass movement would not continue for long. Hence, there emerged voices within the Congress advocating a return to constitutional methods. In some quarters the revival of the Swarajist Party was also discussed. Asaf Ali and S. Satyamurti had raised this issue with Gandhi even during the period of the mass movement. Another prominent Congressman, Dr. M.A. Ansari was in favour of council entry. In 1933 Satyamurti formed the Madras Swaraj Party. K.M. Munshi, B.C. Roy and Ramaswamy lyengar also sought Gandhi's support for the revival of Swaraj Party. Although, at this moment, Gandhi did not favour the idea of constitutional methods, he told them: 'If you believe in the move (return to the constitutional methods) you are free to sponsor it.'

Some Congressmen favoured council entry while a few others like Acharya Narendra Dev and Purshottamdas Tandon opposed it. This reflects the difference of opinion within the Congress with each side eager to influence and tilt the Congress policy but not without Gandhi's consent. As soon as the Civil Disobedience Movement was withdrawn, Gandhi gave a free hand to each side by saying: 'I want all sections to work in all directions towards one thing in their own ways without criticizing one another.'

The section which supported council entry at this time was not exactly following the arguments given by the Swarajists to wreck the constitution from within. Now leaders like Rajagopalachari were advocating council entry which was different from Swarajists in two way: i) it was not meant to wreck the constitution or put obstacles in its smooth functioning, but aimed at making the constitution workable; and ii) in the event of obtaining majority, office was to be accepted and ministries to be formed.

On the other hand, there were Congressmen with Socialist leanings who opposed council entry and were not in favour of making the Constitution workable. The Socialists had organised themselves by forming the Congress Socialist Party within the Congress. However, the differences in opinions, though governed by ideological leanings, were considered internal matters within the Congress. As far as the Congress position vis-à-vis British imperialism was concerned it was always stated in one voice. For example, the objectionable clauses of Act of 1935 were condemned by the Congress with full support from all of its sections. The issue before the Congress was to decide whether to contest the forthcoming elections and accept office or not.

17.3 TOWARDS ELECTIONS

Before we go on to analyse the elections of 1937 and the events related to them we shall discuss briefly the general political situation and some of the earlier

elections. After a lot of discussion and debate the Congress decided in its Lucknow session of 1936 to contest the forthcoming elections for provincial councils. But earlier in October 1934, Gandhi had withdrawn from the Congress refusing 4-anna membership of the Congress. However, this did not mean that his hold over the Congress had weakened or that he was not guiding the Congress policy any longer.

17.3.1 Elections to Local Bodies

Gandhi had given a free hand to all sections to pursue their methods so long as they worked in one direction i.e., opposing the British. Thus, from 1934 the Congress contested elections to the Assembly and the local bodies as and when they were held. These elections proved useful from the following points of view:

i) The Congress could test its popular base through election results.

ii) They gave the Congress tremendous experience in terms of organisation, planning, and managing of elections.

iii) The Congress could test its allies for funds which were needed for electoral politics.

Here we can give the example of the elections held in the Madras Presidency. In May 1935, a Congress Civic Board was formed for selecting party candidates for local elections. The candidates had to pledge themselves to the programme offered by the Board and this included: i) encouragement to Swadeshi; ii) removing corruption; and iii) improvement in medical and educational facilities. The results of local elections were encouraging for the Congress. In Madurai, the Congress won 21 of the 36 seats in the Municipality (October 1935) and a year later (October 1936) 27 out of 40 seats in Madras. In the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly, the Congress wiped out the Justice Party by capturing all the seven seats it contested in this Province. At the national level out of a total of 76 contested seats, the Congress candidates stood for 55 and won 44. The total polling was 650,000 and the Congress had secured 375,000 votes.

It took the Congress a long time to decide in favour of contesting the Provincial Council elections. The Congress Working Committee in its meeting in August 1935 decided that the election participation issue would be settled in the Lucknow session.

17.3.2 Lucknow Congress

The Congress session at Lucknow (April 1936) was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. His presidential speech advocated Socialism which he regarded as 'the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems.' He lauded the role of the masses in the direct action struggles of the Congress but as a note of self-criticism he said: 'Our policies and ideas are governed far more by….middle class outlook than by the consideration of the needs of the great majority of population.' Nehru also took three Socialists into the Congress Working Committee, Jayprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan. A number of resolutions were passed in this session. Prominent among them were:

i) The 'people of the State (princely States) should have the same right of self-determination as those of the rest of India and that the Congress stands for the same political, civil and democratic liberties for every part of India.' But the Congress pointed out that 'the struggle for liberty' was to be carried out by the people of states themselves.

ii) The provincial units of the Congress were asked to conduct agrarian enquiries, the findings of which would facilitate the work of AICC to form an all India Agrarian Programme.

The most important decision was that the Congress resolved to contest elections on the basis of a manifesto. However, the question of office acceptance was kept pending. This was an issue which generated tremendous debate within the Congress. For example, T. Prakasam and Satyamurti strongly advocated office acceptance, while M.R. Masani dismissing this proprosal stated strongly: 'We are told a Congress Ministry will be able to hoist the National Flag on government schools and institutions. The day on which the National Flag is hoisted under the Union Jack our Flag will be polluted and a new National Flag will have to be invented.' In fact, the decision of contesting elections and postponing the question of office acceptance was a kind of compromise between those who were for office acceptance and those who wanted to boycott elections.

Still there was a section of leadership which believed that no ban should have been there on office acceptance. Many Congress leaders thought that a declaration in relation to office acceptance would have further brightened the electoral prospects. In certain Congress quarters discussions were already taking place regarding office acceptance and would-be chief ministers. However, as Rajagopalachari put it: 'The Congress has once again shown its capacity for presenting a united front. The majorities in the debates should not be misunderstood to be any kind of political split. They are the normal machinery for collective thinking.'

17.3.3 Election Manifesto

It was the task of the Parliamentary Committee to draft the Election Manifesto of the Congress. The manifesto aimed at 'explaining the political and economic policy and programme of the Congress'. We list for you the prominent features of the Election Manifesto adopted by the AICC in August 1936:

i) It was made clear that the purpose of sending Congressmen to the legislatures was not to cooperate with the Government, but to combat the Act of 1935 and to end it. British imperialism was to be resisted in its 'attempts to strengthen its hold on India'.

ii) It highlighted the poverty of Indian masses particularly peasants, workers and artisans, and stated that 'for the vast millions of our countrymen the problem of achieving national independence can give us the power to solve our economic and social problems and end the exploitation of our masses'.

iii) The task of the Congress representatives was 'to take all possible steps to end the various regulations, ordinances and Acts which oppress the Indian people'. They would work for: a) establishment of civil liberty, b) release of political prisoners, and c) undoing the wrongs done to the peasants and others.

iv) In relation to industrial workers the policy of the Congress would be to secure for them a decent standard of living, regular hours of work, and better working conditions for labour. The promises made included the right to form unions, suitable machinery to settle disputes with employers, and protection 'against the economic consequences of old age'.

v) There were many other promises in the Manifesto, such as removal of untouchability, equal status for women, encouragement to khadi and village industries, and satisfactory solution to communal problem.

The question of office acceptance was to be decided after the elections. Thus, the Congress was gearing itself for elections, and trying to reach a decision for the selection of candidates. The Lucknow session was important from another point of view as well. It was during this session that the first meeting of the All India Kisan Sabha was held under the presidency of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.

17.3.4 Faizpur Congress

The next session of the Congress was held at Faizpur in December 1936, again under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru. A variety of issues were raised in this session. These were related to both the international and the internal situation. Nehru attacked Fascism in his presidential speech, and the Congress passed resolutions condemning Italian aggression of Abyssinia and Japanese aggression of China. The Congress warned the people against the resources of India being used by British in the case of a World War. On national issues Nehru made it clear that 'the only logical consequence of the Congress policy is to have nothing to do with the office and the ministry. Any deviation from this would….mean a kind of partnership with British Imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people.'

In this session the Congress demanded the formation of a Constituent Assembly to frame a Constitution of their own. The question of office acceptance was deferred again. However, the most important thing which the Congress resolved at Faizpur was the adoption of an agrarian programme. The major features outlined in this programme included 50 per cent reduction in rent and revenue, exemption of uneconomic holdings from rent and land tax, taxation on agricultural income, abolition of feudal levies and forced labour, cooperative farming, wiping out arrears of rent, modification of ejection laws, and recognition of peasant unions (*Kisan Sabhas*).

This programme was however silent on the issue of the abolition of Zamindari and Taluqdari systems. The Kisan Sabha leaders like Sahajanand Saraswati, N.G. Ranga and Indulal Yajnik, though welcoming the programme in general, criticized it on this ground for they felt that these systems were the root cause of peasant exploitation. They were supported by Socialist leaders like Jayprakash Narayan. Here it is worth mentioning that the Right Wing in the Congress was not in favour of Zamindari abolition. But there is no doubt that the Agrarian Programme was a progressive document, and it went a long way in rallying the peasants behind the Congress.

By this time the Congress also went for a mass contact programme and its membership increased tremendously. For example, there were 450,000 members in May 1936 and by December 1936 the number stood at 636,000.

17.4 ELECTIONS OF 1937

Once the Congress decided to contest elections, every Congressman made an all-out effort to ensure the success of Congress candidates.

17.4.1 Selection of Candidates

The general procedure for the selection of candidates was that the Provincial Congress Committee would recommend names to the Congress Parliamentary Board, and the latter would have the final say in the selection. For doing so the PCCs adopted the criteria which specified that the candidate should abide by Congress discipline, and follow and work for the Congress programme. Besides these two basic qualifications, the PCCs also took into account the candidates' services to the Congress, popularity among the people, and ability to bear election expenses on their own. In spite of their sincere efforts to select the best candidates on the basis of above mentioned conditions, in certain cases caste played a role in this process. On being questioned by Maulana Azad about candidate-selection in Bihar, Rajendra Prasad wrote about the role played by caste: 'It is disgraceful for an organisation like the Congress to do so but success in the elections was our first objective, and secondly it should not be overlooked that the Congress is a widespread organisation consisting of people of all castes.'

In certain cases there were disputes over the selection. For example Sahajanand Saraswati was disturbed to see in Bihar that some persons taken in as candidates were in fact opportunists having nothing to do with the Congress earlier. Similarly, in Bombay differences arose between K.F. Nariman and Vallabhbhai Patel. In Andhra, N.G. Ranga, acting on behalf of the Andhra Ryots Association, urged the Congress candidates to sign a pledge. This pledge tied the candidates to work for the peasants' cause inside and outside the legislatures. Many Congress candidates signed the pledge but Vallabhbhai Patel denounced this move. Ranga made it clear that the pledge was in no way against the Congress discipline, rather it strengthened the Congress organisation. Since Patel was adamant, Ranga had to withdraw the pledge.

17.4.2 Election Campaign

The Congress went all out to achieve victory in elections by a vigorous campaigning. Nehru advised the Congress volunteers that the Faizpur Agrarian Programme 'should find a prominent place in our election campaign'. Nehru himself toured throughout the country. Canvassing among the Allahabad villagers, he stated that 'There are only two parties in India-those fighting for the cause of the people and the other against it….. The Congress was going to the Councils to keep out Khan Bahadurs, Raja Bahadurs and Nawabs who sided with Government.' There was a common feeling gaining ground among the people that very soon Congress Raj would replace British Raj.

In Bihar the election took the turn of 'Kisan versus Zamindars'. A popular election song in the countryside was '*magar kothri mein badal janyenge'* (we shall change at the polling booth)' and it was sung by those who were being forced by non-Congress candidate to vote for them. In Madras, Satyamurti toured almost 9000 miles to canvass for Congress candidates. The propaganda here was to 'vote in the yellow box' as practically all Congress candidates opted for yellow coloured

ballot boxes. It was quite apparent that the Justice party would lose. There was tremendous enthusiasm among the electors all over the country. However, in some regions the Congress was in a weak position as many regional parties were also in the fray. For example, in Bengal, the Praja Krishak Party was quite popular, and in a similar position was the Unionist Party in Punjab. In U.P. the landlords had hurriedly formed the Nationalist Agriculturist Party to contest elections but it could not influence the voters. Beside these regional parties the Congress had to face the challenge of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha – parties which carried politics on communal lines. The Muslim League was strong in Sindh. In UP the Congress had an understanding with the Muslim League for forming a joint ministry.

17.4.3 Election Results

Elections were held on different dates in different provinces and the results were very encouraging for the Congress. Except Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh, the Congress had fared well in other regions. In five provinces it had clear majority:

Province	Total No. of Seats	Seats won by Congress
U.P.	228	134
Bihar	152	95
Madras	215	159
C.P.	112	70
Orissa	60	36
Bombay	175	87
Bengal	250	60
Sindh	60	8
Assam	108	35
NWFP	50	19
Punjab	175	18

In Bengal, NWFP, Assam, and Bombay Congress emerged as the single largest party, whereas in Punjab and Sindh its performance was poor. The Congress could not do well in the elections to upper houses as the franchise there was limited to the upper strata only. As far as the reserved seats were concerned, we give few examples of Congress performance (in all 11 provinces):

- Out of the 38 seats reserved for labour, the Congress had contested 20 and won 18.
- 482 seats were reserved as Muslim seats. The Congress constested 58 and could win only 26 seats. Out of these 19 were in NWFP. The Congress could not get a single Muslim seat in Bombay, U.P., C.P., Sindh and Bengal. However, it is worth mentioning here that the performance of the Muslim League was no better. It could not get a single seat in NWFP. In Punjab it got only 2 of the 84 reserved seats.
- For commerce and industry 56 seats were reserved. The Congress contested 8 and could won only 3.

- For Landholders 37 seats were reserved. The Congress contested 8 and won 4.

Thus, the performance of Congress in reserved constituencies was not at all satisfactory except in the labour seats. But it did well in general seats. The Congress Working Committee gave to the people the following message on its electoral victory: 'The Congress Working Committee congratulates the nation on its wonderful response to the call of the Congress during the recent elections, demonstrating the adherence of the masses to Congress policy.'

17.5 OFFICE ACCEPTANCE

As we have seen earlier, the decision of office acceptance had been left pending due to differences within the Congress. The AICC met in March 1937 to decide over the issue. Rajendra Prasad moved a resolution for 'conditional acceptance' of office which was accepted. The condition attached was that the governors would not use their special powers to intervene with the functioning of ministries. Here Jayprakash Narain moved an amendment for total rejection of office but this was defeated when put to vote (78 in favour and 135 against). This was considered as a major victory for the Right Wing within the Congress. Gandhi himself was in favour of conditional acceptance of office.

At this time again there were arguments in favour of and against office acceptance. A vocal argument in favour of forming ministries was that by doing so the Congress would be able to give some relief to peasants and workers. But leaders like N.G. Ranga, Sahajanand Saraswati and Indulal Yajnik described office acceptance as a retreat from the basic Congress policy of non-cooperation with imperialism. Sahajanand felt that the advocates of office acceptance felt exhausted and were 'trying to escape on the pretext of peasants'. And as Vallabhbhai Patel put it: 'Parliamentary mentality had come to stay with the people'.

In six provinces where the Congress was in majority its leaders were invited by the Governors to from ministries. However, this offer was turned down due to the refusal of Governors to give assurances on the conditions put forward by the Congress. The next move of the Government was to form 'Interim Ministries' in these provinces. For example Nawab of Chattari formed his ministry in U.P. and Sir Dhunjishah Cooper did so in Bombay. Here it has to be noted that these were ministries which did not command a majority in the legislatures and hence could not continue in office beyond six months. In Bombay most of the Congressmen who favoured office acceptance could not reconcile with this move of the government. Some of them even felt that what genuinely belonged to them had been given to others. Thus, they made strenuous efforts to pressurise the Working Committee in favour of office acceptance. A similar situation arose in Madras under Rajagopalachari, who by this time was the most vocal leader in favour of office. In Bihar the work of the Kisan Enquiry Committee was revived, but what was being preached in the meeting was office acceptance. In U.P. peasants were encouraged not to pay rents on the assurance that when the Congress formed the ministry all arrears of rents would be remitted.

In some case the governors suggested dissolution of legislatives (like Lord Erskine, the Governor of Madras) to the Viceroy. But Linlithgow felt that the Congress would give way soon, and it was only a matter of time. At this same

time he was aware that those Congressmen who were pro-office had shown remarkable discipline in abiding by the decision of the High Command. On June 20, the Viceroy clarified the stance of the Government in relation to special powers of the Governors vis-à-vis ministers. The C.W.C. met at Wardha in the first week of July and permitted office acceptance.

It is worth mentioning here that most of the Indian capitalists were in favour of office acceptance by the Congress. G.D. Birla was consistently making efforts in this direction and was in touch with Congress leaders. When Gandhi finally gave his consent for office, Birla had written to Mahadev Desai: 'My vanity tickles me to believe that perhaps my letters might have made some contribution in influencing Bapu's mind.' Birla had been so eager to bring the Government close to the Congress that he informed Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State, about Gandhi's statement that 'office acceptance was an attempt to **avoid bloody revolution** on the one hand and mass Civil Disobedience on the other'.

The resignation of the interim ministries was followed by the formation of Congress ministries. It was the beginning of the new era in the freedom-struggle.

Province	**Congress Prime Ministers**
Bombay	B.G. Kher
U.P.	Govind Ballabh Pant
Madras	C.Rajagopalachari
Orissa	Hare Krishna Mehtab
C.P.	Dr. Khare
Bihar	Sri Krishna Sinha
N.W.F.P	Dr. Khan Saheb

In Bengal, Fazlul Huq invited the Congress to cooperate in forming a coalition government. The Congress refused and Huq then joined hands with the Muslim League. In Sindh, Congress supported the ministry of Gulam Hussain Hidayatulla and in Assam of Bardoloi. In Punjab the Congress was not in a position to play a dominant role.

The Congress had delayed the decision of office acceptance by about six months. According to Raini Dhawan Shanker Das (*The First Congress Raj)* the Congress had gained by this delay:

i) The delay had disproved the election time propaganda against the Congress that they were office hungry and would jump at the first opportunity to from ministries.

ii) The Congress unity had been maintained and demonstrated.

iii) It had become clear to Governors and the ministers that the word of the Congress High Command was supreme.

iv) Governors would think several times before intervening in the work of ministers.

17.6 CONGRESS MINISTRIES AT WORK

The task before the Congress was a tremendous one – particularly in the light of the kind of expectations the people had from the Congress. We will now give you a brief thematic account of what the Congress did during nearly 2 ½ years in office.

17.6.1 Political Prisoners and Civil Liberties

The Congress, through its election manifesto, was committed to the release of political prisoners and detenues. Many among them were in prison even without facing trials. The Andaman prisoners had informed Gandhi that they no longer believed in the cult of violence. The largest number of political prisoners was in Bengal, a non-Congress ruled province. Gandhi went to Calcutta to personally negotiate for their release and after three weeks of long talks he was able to secure the release of 1100 detenues. In U.P. many prisoners were released, prominent among them were the Kakori prisoners. There were massive public demonstrations welcoming these prisoners. But the British Government disliked this. Gandhi, Govind Ballabh Pant and Jawaharlal Nehru, while welcoming their release, condemned 'welcome demonstrations'. Pant felt that such a response from the people could affect the release of other prisoners. And sure enough the Governors of U.P. and Bihar stopped the release of prisoners. Just before the Haripura Session (March, 1938) the Prime Ministers of these province submitted their resignations over the issue. The Congress position was clearly stated at Haripura that it would not hesitate in taking action in the 'matter of violent crime' but as the prisoners had shed violence there was no risk in releasing them. Ultimately the Government had to bow down.

The Congress also worked for lifting restrictions on the return to India of political exiles like Rash Behari Gosh, Prithvi Singh, Maulvi Abdullah Khan, Abani Mukerjee, etc. However, it could not do much in this regard.

The Congress was committed to civil liberties within the confines of non-violence. In September 1938 the AICC resolved that 'the Congress warns the public that Civil Liberty does not cover acts of violence, incitement to violence or promulgation of palpable falsehoods.' It was made clear that 'Congress will, consistently with its tradition, support measures that may be undertaken by the Congress Government for the defence of life and property'. The Left Wing in the Congress was opposed to such an approach and this resolution was termed as a defeat for them in the Congress.

17.6.2 The Peasants' Question

The peasant problem was a burning issue. Jawaharlal Nehru observed that 'The outstanding problem of India is the peasant problem. All else is secondary'. He believed that the formation of Congress ministries had generated new hopes amongst the peasants, whereas the big zamindars and taluqdars were 'organizing to resist this long deferred justice to the peasantry'. He stressed that 'we must remain true to our pledges and give satisfaction and fulfillment to the hopes of the peasantry'. The Kisan Sabhas welcomed such a statement from the Congress President in 1937.

Tenancy legislation was taken up in all the Congress ruled provinces. The Right Wing did not want to go ahead in this without negotiating with the landlords and the position varied from province to province. For example, in Bihar the Congress signed a pact with the zamindars regarding the provisions of the Tenancy Bill. Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Azad had been instrumental in bringing about this pact. The Bihar Kisan Sabha was totally ignored and the pact was severely criticized not only by the Left Wing but also by those Congressmen who sympathised with the peasants' cause. Prasad had written to the Maharaja of Dharbhanga that he 'shall come in for a great deal of criticism from not only the Kisan Sabha but Congress in general and even perhaps the High Command'. It was at this time that a ban was imposed on the Congressmen for participating in Kisan Sabha activities in Bihar. In Bihar the Congress policy was to an extent pro-zamindari. The zamindars were confident that for their sake 'the Kisan movement was being suppressed by the Congress.' On the other hand, the Kisan Sabha launched a number of struggles at regional levels to remind the Congress for implementing the Faizpur Agrarian Programme.

The situation in U.P. was different from Bihar. The U.P. Congress was dominated more by the Left Wing. The Tenancy Bill which was passed here was not given assent by the Governor even after two years of its passage. In Bombay the Congress was successful in getting those lands restored to their original owners which had been sold to new owners as a result of the no-rent campaign during the Civil-Disobedience Movement.

In all the provinces, efforts were made to protect the peasant from moneylenders and increase irrigation facilities. But in most of the areas the zamindars remained in a dominant position. For example, the zamindar of Kalli Kote in Orissa paraded lorry loads of Reserve Police in his villages to warn the peasants that he was as powerful as ever in the Congress regime, but on the whole, this was a period of tremendous awakening among the peasants, and they stood behind the Congress.

17.6.3 Labour

The Congress had promised better working conditions to the working class. However, its labour policy was influenced by the relations between the Right Wing and the Left Wing. The Right Wing believed that the relations between the labourers and capitalists should be based on the Gandhian principle of Trusteeship, but the Left Wing wanted to deal with them along class lines. In October 1937, the Labour Committee appointed by the Congress, gave a programme which was accepted by the AICC. This included:

- holidays with pay,
- employment insurance,
- leave with pay during sickness,
- to devise way to fix minimum wages, and
- recognition of such Trade Unions by the State which pursued a policy of peaceful and legitimate means.

However, Bombay was the only province to undertake Labour Legislation. The Ministry introduced the Industrial Disputes Bill with the aim to prevent strikes and lockouts as far as possible. According to the workers this only meant a ban

on strikes as a lockout was the most effective 'weapon in the armoury of Capitalists for the exploitation of workers' against which the government could do nothing. The workers went on strike which was crushed by the Congress government with the help of the police. About 20 workers were killed in the police action.

This period also saw a massive workers strike in Kanpur where 24,000 workers struck work in August, 1937 demanding higher wages and better living conditions. Here also the strike was condemned by the Congress leaders. When the workers started picketting, Nehru stressed:

'If violence is resorted to, it cannot be expected that the government will not interfere and the army or police will not be called. The workers should remember that the government is very powerful and will put down violence by violence and that the workers will be subdued in no time.'

Ultimately the dispute was settled by the Ministry. In Bengal the Congress supported the strike in Jute Mills (March- May 1937). The Bengal PCC condemned the repression of Jute workers by the Huq ministry which was a non-Congress government. During the TISCO workers strike at Jamshedpur Nehru and Rajendra Prasad acted as arbitrators between the Tatas and workers. Over all, the left increased its influence over labour during this period.

17.6.4 Constructive Programme

In all the Congress ruled provinces, sincere efforts were made to introduce prohibition, encourage education and give impetus to village industries. These included:

- A vigorous campaign in favour of prohibition,
- A grant of 2 Lakh rupees for Khadi and hand-spinning by the Madras Ministry,
- Honorary medical officers to be appointed in hospitals, and
- Investment on public buildings to be considerably reduced.

An advance was made in the field of education. An All India National Education Conference was held at Wardha (22 and 23 October, 1937). The Conference formulated a scheme which included:

- Free and compulsory education to be provided for seven years throughout the country,
- Mother tongue should be the medium of instruction, and
- Emphasis on vocational and Manual Training.

On the basis of these guidelines Dr. Zakir Hussain submitted a scheme of Basic education to be implemented by the Congress Ministries (2 December, 1937). This scheme included learning of basic crafts; proper knowledge of mother tongue; basic scientific knowledge, etc. In many provinces, attempts were made to put this scheme into action. As a result of the Congress education policy the number of students as well as educational institutions increased. For example, in Bombay province the number of educational institutions was 14,609 in 1936-37 and by 1939-40 it increased to 18,729. Similarly, the number of pupils which was 1,335,889 in 1936-37 increased to 1,556,441 by 1939-40.

Some other major achievements of the Congress Ministries were:

- Reduction in salaries of Ministers,
- The declaration of Fundamental Rights,
- Welfare Schemes for Tribals,
- Carrying Jail Reforms,
- Repeal of Moplah Outrages Act, and
- Carrying out commercial and economic surveys.

A very important feature of this period was the change in the attitude of government officials. They had to work under those very leaders who were earlier arrested by them.

17.6.5 Some Problems Faced by Congress

There was a malicious propaganda carried out against the Congress by the Communal parties. They accused the Congress of discrimination against the minorities, but such propaganda was carried out due to political and communal overtones, rather than on factual basis.

At the same time, many opportunists joined the Congress during this period in order to seek advantages of office. The Congress was aware of such characters, and Gandhi wrote frankly about corruption in the Congress in his paper *Harijan.* In many regions a drive was made to free the Congress from such elements.

During this period, the Congress held two sessions. The Fifty First session was held at Haripura in February, 1938 under the presidentship of Subhas Chandra Bose. This session passed a number of resolutions related to international affairs as well as on the internal situation in India. However, it was at the next session (Tripuri) that the Congress faced a major crisis. This time an election was held for the President and Bose defeated Pattabhi Sitaramayya by 1580 to 1377 votes. This was regarded as a victory of the Left Wing, as the Right Wing had solidly supported Sitaramayya. Even Gandhi regarded this defeat as his own defeat. There were problem in the formation of the working committee and ultimately Bose resigned from the Presidentship.

The Congress Ministries resigned office in November, 1939 on the ground that the Viceroy on its own had made India a participant in the imperialist war without consulting the Congress. The Muslim League under Jinnah celebrated this as 'deliverance day' whereas the nationalists stood behind the Congress and the subsequent events led to the individual Satyagraha in 1900 and the Quit India movement in 1942, besides Bose going aboard and leading the Azad Hind Fauj.

17.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit we have seen how the Congress after a long debate decided to contest the elections and emerged victorious in five provinces. The victory of the Congress was attributed to its pro-people policies particularly the agrarian programme. In most of the cases the Zamindars and communal forces opposed the Congress. Though there was difference of opinion among the Congressmen in relation to participation in elections and then for office acceptance, once a decision was

taken everyone stood solidly behind it. The Ministries functioned under certain limitations, but tried their best to give relief to the people. The constructive programme got a boost during this period. The formation of Congress Ministries was perceived by the people as their own Raj, and they firmly believed that the days of the British Raj were numbered. Though the Left Wing was very vocal, it was the Right Wing which dominated in the Congress in decision-making in view of the fight against colonialism.

17.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the ways in which the Congress prepared for the elections in 1937.

2) How do you perceive the election results in 1937? Was it a success or failure for the Congress? Give reasons for your answer.

3) Discuss the achievements of the Congress ministries.

4) What do you think were the problems in running a nationalist government under colonial dispensation?

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UNIT 18 THE IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM IN THE 1930s*

Structure

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18.6 Summary

18.7 Exercises

18.1 INTRODUCTION

There are some core debates which permeate the study of nations and nationalism. These centre on the question of how to define the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism' and when nations first appeared. Are the nations timeless phenomena? Did man climb out of the primordial slime and immediately set about creating nations. Or did nations take different shapes at different points in history. The modernisation school see nations as entirely modern and constructed. Then the major question is how nations and nationalism developed. If nations are naturally occurring, then there is little reason to explain the birth of nations. On the other hand, if one sees nations as constructed, then it is important to be able to explain why and how nations developed. Nation, nationhood and nationalism are subject to a variety of morphologies. Nationalism is not a homogeneous ideology and means different things to different people. One way is to see it as a political-ideological spectrum. What is a political-ideological spectrum? A **political spectrum** is a way of modeling different political positions by placing them upon one or more geometric axes symbolizing independent political dimensions. Most long-standing spectra include a right wing and left wing, which originally referred to seating arrangements in the 18th century French parliament. According to the simplest left-right axis, communism and socialism are usually regarded internationally as being on the left, opposite fascism and conservatism on the right. Liberalism can mean different things in different contexts, sometimes on the left, sometimes on the right. However, others have frequently noted that a single left-right axis is insufficient in describing the existing variation in political beliefs, and often include other axes. The nature of spectrum depends on what is the focus of political concern: the community or the individual.

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18.2 THE GANDHIAN CORE

Ever since the emergence of Gandhi, even though elected as the Congress president only once in Belgaum Session (1924), Gandhi combined a strange mixture of western notion of equality, rights and citizenship with an equally strong millenarian appeal to become the unofficial, spiritual and mass icon of the Congress from early 1920s to the end of British rule. The Congress was under his shadow all these long turbulent years. Gandhi combined democratic-participative leadership style with autocratic-charismatic style with such an ease that there was no escape from him. He transformed the organisational structure of the Congress, which it follows almost to this date and also tried to shape it in his own ideological mould which he succeeded only partially because the Congress attracted people from different ideologies in the pre-independence era and became a kind of umbrella organisation. In the beginning of 1930, Gandhi reasserted his leadership after a gap in which Congress was internally divided into Swarajist and No-changers after the collapse of the Non-Cooperation. He launched his second major 'non-violent' offensive against the British rule.

18.2.1 Anti-Imperialist Non-Cooperation Campaign

The Satyagraha march, which triggered the wider Civil Disobedience Movement, was an important part of the Indian independence movement. It was a campaign of non-violent protest against the British salt tax in colonial India which began with the Salt March to Dandi on March 12, 1930. It was the most significant organised challenge to British authority since the Non-cooperation movement of 1920-22, and the *Purna Swaraj* declaration of independence by the Indian National Congress on December 31, 1929. Mahatma Gandhi led the Dandi march from his Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, Gujarat to produce salt without paying the tax, with growing numbers of Indians joining him along the way. When Gandhi broke the salt laws in Dandi at the conclusion of the march on April 6, 1930, it sparked large scale acts of civil disobedience against the British Raj salt laws by millions of Indians. We will discuss it in some detail to show you the anti-imperialist mass character of the Congress.

18.2.2 The Preparation for the Dandi March

As with his other movements, Gandhi conceived of a brilliant plan to begin the Civil Disobedience with defiance of salt laws. The issue selected was such that it was a concern of every poor man and Gandhi was also aware that non-violent method ensured mass-participation which could not have been possible if the movement had been violent type. Choosing the salt tax as an injustice to the people of India was considered an ingenious choice because every peasant and every aristocrat understood the necessity of salt in everyday life. It was also a good choice because it did not alienate Congress moderates while simultaneously being an issue of enough importance to mobilize a mass following.

On February 5, newspapers reported that Gandhi would begin civil disobedience by defying the salt laws. The Salt Satyagraha would begin on March 12 and end in Dandi with Gandhi breaking the Salt Act on April 6. Gandhi chose April 6 to launch the mass breaking of the salt laws for a symbolic reason—it was the first day of 'National Week', begun in 1919 when Gandhi conceived of the national *hartal* (strike) against the Rowlatt Act. Gandhi prepared the worldwide media

for the march by issuing regular statements from Sabarmati, at his regular prayer meetings and through direct contact with the press. Gandhi prepared the worldwide media for the march by issuing regular statements from Sabarmati, at his regular prayer meetings and through direct contact with the press. For the march itself, Gandhi wanted the strictest discipline and adherence to Satyagraha and ahimsa. For that reason, he recruited the marchers not from Congress Party members, but from the residents of his own *ashram*, who were trained in Gandhi's strict standards of discipline. The 24-day march would pass through 4 districts and 48 villages. The route of the march, along with each evening's stopping place, was planned ahead of time based on recruitment potential, past contacts, and timing. Gandhi sent scouts to each village ahead of the march so he could plan his talks at each resting place, based on the needs of the local residents. On March 2, 1930 Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, offering to stop the march if Irwin met eleven demands, including reduction of land revenue assessments, cutting military spending, imposing a tariff on foreign cloth, and abolishing the salt tax. His strongest appeal to Irwin referred to the salt tax: 'I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the Independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil.'

18.2.3 The Dandi March

On March 12, 1930, Gandhi and approximately 78 male Satyagrahis set out, on foot, for the coastal village of Dandi some 240 miles from their starting point in Sabarmati, a journey which was to last 23 days. According to *The Statesman*, the official government newspaper which usually played down the size of crowds at Gandhi's functions, 100,000 people crowded the road that separated Sabarmati from Ahmedabad. The first day's march of 21 kilometres ended in the village of Aslali, where Gandhi spoke to a crowd of about 4,000. At Aslali, and the other villages that the march passed through, volunteers collected donations, registered new Satyagrahis, and received resignations from village officials who chose to end cooperation with British rule. As they entered each village, crowds greeted the marchers, beating drums and cymbals. Gandhi gave speeches attacking the salt tax as inhuman, and the Salt Satyagraha as a 'poor man's battle'. Each night they slept in the open, asking of the villagers nothing more than simple food and a place to rest and wash. Gandhi felt that this would bring the poor into the battle for independence, necessary for eventual victory. Thousands of Satyagrahis and leaders like Sarojini Naidu joined him. Every day, more and more people joined the march. At Surat, they were greeted by 30,000 people. When they reached the railhead at Dandi, more than 50,000 were gathered. Gandhi gave interviews and wrote articles along the way. Foreign journalists made him a household name in Europe and America. Near the end of the march, Gandhi declared, 'I want world sympathy in this battle of Right against Might.' On April 6th he picked up a lump of mud and salt (some say just a pinch, some say just a grain) and boiled it in seawater to make the commodity which no Indian could legally produce salt.

He implored his thousands of followers to begin to make salt wherever, along the seashore, 'was most convenient and comfortable' to them. A 'war' on the salt tax was to be continued during the National Week, that is, up to the thirteenth of April. There were also simultaneous boycotts of cloth and khaddar. Salt was sold, illegally, all over the seacoast of India.

18.2.4 The Aftermath of March and its Consequences

What Gandhi did at Dandi was only a ritual beginning. It was followed by the defiance of Salt laws all over country. In Tamil Nadu, C. Rajagopalachari, led volunteers in a salt march from Trichinopoly to Vedaranniyam on the Tanjore coast. In Malabar, K. Kelappan, the leader of famous Vaikom temple entry Satyagraha, walked from Calicut to Pyannur to break the salt laws. Similar mobilizations of people were happening all over coastal area. Gandhi's announcement that he would lead a raid of volunteers on the Dharsana salt works, compelled the Government to arrest him on 4 May. The arrest of Gandhi sparked off a massive wave of protests all over India.

On May 21, with Sarojini Naidu and Gandhi's son Manilal in front ranks, a band of 2,000 volunteers marched towards the police cordon that had sealed off the Dharsana salt works. The volunteers were brutally beaten by the police with many of them suffering fatal injuries in the incident. In many places, salt Satyagraha assumed mass dimension. At Wadala, a suburb of Bombay, the raid on salt works culminated on 1 June in mass action of a crowd of 15,000 who broke the police cordon to carry away salt. In Karnataka, about 10,000 people marched in a similar action at Sanikatta salt works defying police *lathis* and bullets. From Midnapore in Bengal to the extreme South Tamil Nadu, people violated salt laws on the entire eastern coast in large numbers.

But salt Satyagraha was only a beginning for varied forms of defiance of British authority that it brought in its wake during the Civil Disobedience. From boycott of foreign clothes to boycott of liquor and from non-payment of *Chowkidari* tax (*Chowkidars* or guards in villages were paid out of taxes levied on villages and who acted as a supplementary police force in rural areas) to defiance of forest laws, it marked a new stage in the anti-imperialist struggle of Indian people.

Gandhi signed a temporary 'truce' popularly known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on March 5, 1930. The political prisoners were to be released under the terms of this agreement, except those convicted for violent acts. The fines that had not been collected so far were to be remitted, the confiscated lands of peasants not yet sold to the third parties were to be returned and government servants who had resigned during the movement were to be treated leniently and the congress was to withdraw its Civil-Disobedience movement and would participate in the Round Table Conference. The Congress endorsed the pact subsequently in its Karachi Session in March, 1931.

18.2.5 Karachi Session, Internal Debate and the Congress Ministries

Karachi Session was also an ideological milestone for Gandhi's politics as it reiterated the goal of complete independence or *Purna Swaraj*. It also passed the outstanding resolution on Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programme. Gandhi had expressed doubts about the parliamentary form of democracy but the resolution demonstrated the commitment of the Congress to the civil and political rights of people. The resolution guaranteed the basic civic rights of free speech, free press, and free assembly; equality before law irrespective of caste creed or gender; neutrality of the state in regard to religious matters; elections on the basis of universal adult franchise etc.

An internal debate on the question of strategy emerged within Congress after the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience. Gandhi stressed constructive work in the villages centring on the revival of village crafts. Another section led by M. A. Ansari, Asif Ali, Bhullabhai Desai advocated revival of constitutional method. The third alternative was suggested by the left-minded intellectuals and leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru who wanted to broaden the anti-imperialist struggle by taking up day-to-day class and economic demands of workers and peasants, organising them in trade unions and *kisan sabhas*.

In August 1935, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act of 1935. The provinces were to be governed under a new system of provincial autonomy under which elected ministers controlled all provincial departments. After the elections to provincial legislatures in early 1937, there were sharp differences between the left and right within Congress over the question of assuming ministries in the provinces. Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose, the Congress Socialists and Communists opposed office acceptance in the provincial governments. However, finally Congress formed ministries in the provinces where it had gained majority. Apart from providing a space for civil liberties, removing psychological fear of bureaucracy, the Congress ministries also tried to provide temporary economic relief to peasants by taking up agrarian legislation.

18.3 THE LIBERALS AS NEGOTIATORS

The main trend of 1929 was the deepening crisis in which the British Government through its new Viceroy Lord Irwin offered a Round Table Conference but refused to offer more, while the Indian National Congress moved toward the movement of 1930. Among the Liberals, Sapru in particular tried to avert the crisis by mediating between Congress leaders and the Viceroy. He ultimately failed, due to forces beyond his control, but he made a reputation as a freelance negotiator. His other major crusade, next to the quest for a Dominion constitution, was for a settlement of the communal problem. In this also he would ultimately fail, but it remained true that in this sphere of negotiation the Liberal spirit of dedication to compromise was especially needed. Next to M. K. Gandhi, Sapru was probably the Indian leader most devoted to mediation in this cause. It is ironic that Sapru's pragmatic, individualistic approach to negotiation may have marked both the highest refinement and the worst vice in Indian Liberalism. In fact, the time had passed when the Liberals had much power as an organised group.

The year 1930 began with the launching of the second great movement by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. Yet the Indian Liberals fixed their hopes on the first official Round Table Conference scheduled for the fall of the year. A number of Liberals attended the first Round Table Conference (November 1930 to January 1931). Sapru, ably seconded by V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, made it his task to rally the Indian Princes to the idea of an all-India federal union, recognising that Dominion status would be a frail thing unless it embraced both the British Indian provinces and the princely Indian States. Yet nothing was permanently settled, and the communal negotiations had become deadlocked. Sapru had difficulty getting other Liberals such as C. Y. Chintamani and C. H. Setalvad to join in a conciliatory approach to either the Princes or the Muslims. It is clear, however, that princely and Muslim demands were being pitched so high as to make ultimate agreement unlikely. When Sapru publicised his estrangement from most other Liberals at the conference by announcing his withdrawal from their

ranks, it served as a milepost in their continuing decline as an organisation, and it weakened not only the Liberal Party's position but, ultimately, Sapru's.

Both Sapru and the other Liberals were determined, in spite of their internecine troubles, to use the positive results of the conference to bring together the Government of India and the Congress radicals. Returning to India, Sapru and Sastri hurried to act as intermediaries between Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, on one hand and imprisoned Congressmen, but especially Gandhi, on the other. Irwin's move of releasing Congress leaders and the amenability of Gandhi to negotiation were no doubt the principal factors in the Irwin-Gandhi pact of March 1931 and in the uneasy truce which led to Congress participation in the second Round Table Conference. The Indian Liberals and their ally Sapru were themselves divided over the extent to which princely and Indian minority demands should be accepted. Despite Liberal negotiations with all factions, the result was failure. The position of the Indian Liberals as mediators reached a new low in 1933, leaving a disillusioned fragment of the old Liberal Party which talked fitfully of disbanding altogether. It remained only for Sapru and a fraction of the remaining Liberals to exert what limited efforts their individual prestige allowed them. The Liberal Party did not dissolve itself but struggled on, meeting in formal session almost every year up to 1945; thereafter its executive council met from time to time. As a party, however, the Liberals had lost all their influence. This was demonstrated by the elections of 1936 under the Reform Act of 1935, which gave Indians the opportunity at least of erecting cabinet-style governments in the Indian provinces. The Liberal Party contested the elections, but the Congress dominated the polls almost everywhere. Most of the Liberals then fumed on the sidelines until the Congress ministries resigned in 1939.

Looking back over the history of Indian Liberalism, it is possible to see that the causes of Liberal decline were already present in the rise and the basic character of this school of thought. The Indian Liberals had developed into intermediaries in two senses by 1900. First, they had purposely assumed the role of representatives of Indian interests and the Indian people at the bar of British political opinion. Then, gradually, they had been drawn by circumstances into a mediating position between the aggressive nationalism of the Indian radicals and the entrenched imperialism of the British power structure. The new role also marked an essential weakness of the Liberals as a group almost from the beginning of their history. Their strain of individualism not only weakened party discipline but was capable of breaking across party lines altogether. They lacked the backing of a large unified party with significant popular support, and thus, had poor credentials even as mediators and negotiators.

The failure of Liberal efforts to get a really advanced set of constitutional reforms for India, or to bring about a lasting truce between either the Congress and the British government or the Hindus and the Muslims, demonstrated this basic problem of the Liberals both as a group and as individuals. They lacked the sanctions which the backing of numbers alone could provide. They could reason and cajole all they might, whether collectively or individually, but they could nevertheless be ignored with impunity by the major parties to the disputes which they attempted to mediate. The Round Table Conferences demonstrated that they could not persuade any of the major combatants, government, Congress or Muslim League to take them seriously. The Indian Liberals can be credited with having had the courage to persevere in an unpopular position and the honest desire to avoid extremes that assume only one's own position to be the true one.

18.4 THE LEFT TURN AND RADICAL ALTERNATIVES TO THE CONGRESS

There were many left groups which provided different viewpoints from the official Congress position. The main among them were the Congress Socialist Party, the Forward Bloc and the Communist Party.

The **Congress Socialist Party** (CSP) was founded in 1934 as a socialist caucus within the Indian National Congress. Its members rejected what they saw as the anti-rational mysticism of Mohandas Gandhi as well as the sectarian attitude of the Communist Party of India towards the Congress Party. Influenced by Fabianism as well as Marxism, the CSP included advocates of armed struggle or sabotage (such as Jayprakash Narayan and Basawon Singh (Sinha) as well as those who insisted upon ahimsa or nonviolent resistance (such as Acharya Narendra Deva). The CSP advocated decentralised socialism in which co-operatives, trade unions, independent farmers, and local authorities would hold a substantial share of the economic power. As secularists, they hoped to transcend communal divisions through class solidarity. Some, such as Narendra Deva or Basawon Singh, advocated a democratic socialism distinct from both Marxism and reformist social democracy. During the Popular Front period, the communists worked within CSP. Basawon Singh, along with Yogendra Shukla, was among the founder members of Congress Socialist Party from Bihar.

Jayprakash Narayan and Minoo Masani were released from jail in April 1934. Narayan convened a meeting in Patna on May 17, 1934, which founded the Bihar Congress Socialist Party. Narayan became general secretary of the party and Acharya Narendra Deva became president. The Patna meeting gave a call for a socialist conference which would be held in connection to the Congress Annual Conference. At this conference, held in Bombay, on 22-23 October 1934, they formed a new All India party, the Congress Socialist Party. Narayan became general secretary of the party, and Masani joint secretary. The conference venue was decorated by Congress flags and a portrait of Karl Marx. In the new party the greeting 'comrade' was used. Masani mobilised the party in Bombay, whereas Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Puroshottam Trikamdas organised the party in other parts of Maharashtra. Ganga Sharan Singh (Sinha) was among the prominent leaders of the Indian National Congress Party as among the founders of the Congress Socialist Party. The constitution of the CSP defined that the members of CSP were the members of the Provisional Congress Socialist Parties and that they were all required to be members of the Indian National Congress. Members of communal organisations or political organisations whose goals were incompatible with the ones of CSP, were barred from CSP membership. The Bombay conference raised the slogan of mobilising the masses for a Constituent Assembly.

In 1936 the Communists joined CSP, as part of the Popular Front strategy of the Comintern. In some states, like Kerala and Orissa, communists came to dominate CSP. In fact communists dominated the entire Congress in Kerala through its hold of CSP at one point. In 1936, the CSP began fraternal relations with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party of Ceylon. In 1937 the CSP sent Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya on a speaking tour of the island. The CSP had adopted Marxism in 1936, and in their third conference in Faizpur they had formulated a thesis

that directed the party to work to transform the Indian National Congress into an anti-imperialist front.

During the summer of 1938 a meeting took place between the Marxist sector of the Anushilan movement and the CSP. Present in the meeting were Jayprakash Narayan (leader of CSP), Jogesh Chandra Chatterji, Tribid Kumar Chaudhuri and Keshav Prasad Sharma. The Anushilan Marxists then held talks with Acharya Narendra Deva, a former Anushilan militant. The Anushilan Marxists decided to join CSP, but keeping a separate identity within the party. The non-Marxists (who constituted about a half of the membership of the Samiti), although not ideologically attracted to the CSP, felt loyalty towards its Marxist sector. Moreover, around 25% of the membership of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association joined the CSP. This group was led by Jogesh Chandra Chatterji. The Anushilan Marxists were however soon to be disappointed by developments inside the CSP. The party, at the time Anushilan marxists had joined it, was not a homogeneous entity. There was the Marxist trend led by J.P. Narayan and Narendra Deva, the Fabian socialist trend led by Minoo Masani and Asoka Mehta and a Gandhian socialist trend led by Ram Manohar Lohia and Achyut Patwardan. To the Anushilan Marxists differences emerged between the ideological stands of the party and its politics in practice. These differences surfaced at the 1939 annual session of the Indian National Congress at Tripuri. At Tripuri, in the eyes of the Anushilan Marxists, the CSP had failed to consistently defend Subhas Chandra Bose. Jogesh Chandra Chatterji renounced his CSP membership in protest against the action by the party leadership.

Soon after the Tripuri session, Bose resigned as Congress president and formed the **Forward Bloc**. The Forward Bloc was intended to function as a unifying force for all left-wing elements. It held its first conference on June 22–23, 1939, and at the same time a Left Consolidation Committee consisting of the Forward Bloc, CPI, CSP, the Kisan Sabha, League of Radical Congressmen, Labour Party and the Anushilan Marxists. At this moment, in October 1939, J.P. Narayan tried to extend an olive branch to the Anushilan Marxists. He proposed the formation of a 'War Council' consisting of himself, Pratul Ganguly, Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee and Acharya Narendra Deva. But few days later, at a session of the All India Congress Committee, J.P. Narayan and the other CSP leaders pledged not to start any other movements parallel to those initiated by Gandhi. The Left Consolidation Committee soon fell into pieces, as the CPI, the CSP and the Royists deserted it. The Anushlian Marxists left the CSP soon thereafter, forming the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

The **Forward Bloc of the Indian National Congress** was formed on 3 May 1939 by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, who had resigned from the presidency of the Indian National Congress on April 29 after being outmaneuvered by Gandhi. The formation of the Forward Bloc was announced to the public at a rally in Calcutta. Initially the aim of the Forward Bloc was to rally all the leftwing sections within the Congress and develop an alternative leadership inside the Congress. A Forward Bloc Conference was held in Bombay in the end of June. At that conference the constitution and programme of the Forward Bloc were approved. In July 1939, Subhas Chandra Bose announced the Committee of the Forward Bloc. It had Subhas Chandra Bose as president, S.S. Cavesheer from Punjab as its vice-president, Lal Shankarlal from Delhi, as its general secretary and Pandit B Tripathi and Khurshed Nariman from Bombay as secretaries. Other prominent

members were Annapurniah from Andhra Pradesh, Senapati Bapat, Hari Vishnu Kammath from Bombay, Pasumpon U Muthuramalingam Thevar from Tamil Nadu and Sheel Bhadra Yajee from Bihar. Satya Ranjan Bakshi, was appointed as the secretary of the Bengal Provincial Forward Bloc. In August the same year Bose began publishing a newspaper titled *Forward Bloc*. He travelled around the country, rallying support for his new political project.

The **Communist Party of India**, founded in 1920s, had tried to work through the Workers and Peasant Parties (as a kind of mass-front for the Communists). All open communist activities were carried out through Workers and Peasants Parties. The Colonial theses of the 6th Comintern congress called upon the Indian communists to combat the 'national-reformist leaders' and to 'unmask the national reformism of the Indian National Congress and oppose all phrases of the Swarajists, Gandhists, etc. about passive resistance'. The Congress also denounced the WPP. The Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, July 3, 1929 – July 19, 1929, directed the Indian communists to break with WPP. When the communists deserted it, the WPP fell apart. Then most of the Communist leaders were arrested and charged under the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case in 1929. The party was reorganised in 1933, after the communist leaders from the Meerut trials were released. A central committee of the party was set up. In 1934 the party was accepted as the Indian section of the Communist International. When Indian left-wing elements formed the Congress Socialist Party in 1934, the CPI branded it as Social Fascist.

In connection with the change of policy of the Comintern toward Popular Front politics, the Indian communists changed their relation to the Indian National Congress. The communists joined the Congress Socialist Party, which worked as the left wing of Congress. Through joining CSP the CPI accepted the CSP demand for Constituent Assembly, which it had denounced two years before. The CPI however analysed that the demand for Constituent Assembly would not be a substitute for soviets. In July 1937, the first Kerala unit of CPI was founded at a clandestine meeting in Calicut. Five persons were present at the meeting, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Krishna Pillai, N.C. Sekhar, K. Damodaran and S.V. Ghate. The first four were members of the CSP in Kerala. The latter, Ghate, was a CPI Central Committee member, who had arrived from Madras. Contacts between the CSP in Kerala and the CPI had begun in 1935, when P. Sundarayya (CC member of CPI, based in Madras at the time) met with EMS and Krishna Pillai. Sundarayya and Ghate visited Kerala at several times and met with the CSP leaders there. The contacts were facilitated through the national meetings of the Congress, CSP and All India Kisan Sabha.

In 1936-1937, the cooperation between socialists and communists reached its peak. At the 2nd congress of the CSP, held in Meerut in January 1936, a thesis was adopted which declared that there was a need to build 'a united Indian Socialist Party based on Marxism-Leninism'. At the 3rd CSP congress, held in Faizpur, several communists were included into the CSP National Executive Committee. In Kerala communists won control over CSP, and for a brief period controlled Congress there. Two communists, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Z.A. Ahmed, became All India joint secretaries of CSP. The CPI also had two other members inside the CSP executive. On the occasion of the 1940 Ramgarh Congress Conference, CPI released a declaration called *Proletarian Path*, which sought to utilise the weakened state of the British Empire in the time of war and

gave a call for general strike, no-tax, no-rent policies and mobilising for an armed revolution uprising. The National Executive of the CSP assembled at Ramgarh took a decision that all communists were expelled from CSP.

18.5 THE REVOLUTIONARIES ON THE FRINGES AS THE COMMANDOS OF NATIONALISM

Dissatisfied with slow nature of mass mobilization, sections of educated youth turned towards revolutionary methods and armed overthrow of the British regime. There were basically two strands of revolutionaries, one working in the northern India, especially in Punjab and UP, and the other one in Bengal. The striking feature of revolutionaries in late 1920s and early 1930s were the direct and indirect influence of working class movement and the Socialist and Marxist ideas on them. In September, 1928, revolutionaries in northern India forged links among themselves and founded the famous Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (Army). Gradually the leadership was also moving away from politics of individual assassination and 'heroic actions' but the death of Lala Lajpat Rai, as a result of a brutal lathi-charge, once again forced them to attempt 'revenge' by killing Saunders, the police official involved in the lathi-charge. Then Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Dutt threw a bomb, not to kill or harm any individual but to oppose the passage of the Public Safety Bill and Trade Disputes Bill in the Central Legislative Assembly. These measures would have curtailed the civil liberties of the citizens and workers. Later Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were tried and sentenced to death in March, 1931. They won the sympathy and admiration of people and became the icons of sacrifice and national self-determination. A similar mass sympathy was evoked by the death of Jatin Das, another revolutionary who died in Lahore Jail after fasting for 64 days. People flocked in thousands at every station when his body was carried from Lahore to Calcutta. At Calcutta, a two mile long procession of about 6 lakh people carried his body to cremation ground.

In Bengal too there was some reorganisation and ideological tilting of the revolutionaries. Some even participated in the Congress mass activities. After the death of C. R. Das, the Congress leadership got divided into Subash Chandra Bose and J. M. Sengupta factions. The revolutionaries of Yugantar helped the former and those of Anushilan the latter. Surya Sen had participateD in the Gandhian Non-Cooperation, and was the secretary of the Chittagong District Congress Committee in 1929. He later become a teacher in a national school in Chittagong, attracted a large band of dedicated revolutionaries, and tried to overcome factionalism of the existing groups. Surya Sen and his group decided to organise an armed insurrection to demonstrate the possibility of such a course of action. Their action plan was to raid and loot the two main armouries of Chittagong and dislocate the railway communications so that local British troops did not receive timely outside military help. The action took place on 18 April, 1930. Subsequently they left Chittagong and a clash with British troops took place on Jalalabad hills with casualties on both sides. However, Surya Sen and his group managed to escape and carried on a guerilla fights from the villages till 1933. Surya Sen was captured on 16 February 1933 and hanged on 12 January 1934 an many of his co-fighters were sentenced to long-term of imprisonment.

18.6 SUMMARY

We have seen that Indian nationalism was not a homogeneous movement and represented a complex phenomenon. This Complexity of national movement shows that though the Gandhian core remained on the centre stage and launched a massive anti-imperialist struggle in the form of Civil Disobedience in the beginning of 1930s, it was still flexible enough to accommodate within its organisational structure and ideology a wide range of political perspectives ranging from liberals like Tej Bahadur Sapru to people belonging to radical left. As a result of this, the social base of the movement also got widened. A variety of political and ideological currents co-existed and worked together, while contending to establish their respective domains of influence. This diversity and spirit of debate was not its weakness but its strength.

18.7 EXERCISES

1) What were the various trends within nationalist movement? Discuss the reasons for the failure of the Liberals.

2) Discuss the ideas of and relationship between Socialists and Communists.

3) Write a note on the Dandi March and its impact on nationalist movement.

UNIT 19 POLITICAL DEMOCRATISATION IN THE PRINCELY STATES*

Structure

19.1 Introduction

19.2 The Evolution of Princely Order

19.3 Basic Features of Autocracies in the Princely States

19.4 Initiatives for Democratisation from Above

19.5 Political Mobilisation in Princely States as a Tool of Democratisation

19.6 The Praja Mandals in Orissa Garjat States in 1930s

19.7 Democratic Aspirations of the Masses in States on the Eve of Independence

- 19.7.1 Democratic Struggle in Hyderabad
- 19.7.2 Democratisation in Jammu and Kashmir

19.8 Summary

19.9 Exercises

19.1 INTRODUCTION

The patterns of the British conquest and the methods of creating an empire resulted in the emergence of princely order in India. The princes ruled over about 2/5th of the Indian subcontinent which had about 1/3rd the population of the British Empire in India. Some of these states were as big as some European countries while we also had many very small principalities or feudal estates. The one common feature of these states was that they all recognized the paramountcy of the British Crown. They enjoyed little independence in relation to that paramount power and were treated as subordinate or feudatory states. But the rulers of these states enjoyed full autocratic powers over their subjects. The British protected the autocracies of the princes from both internal and external dangers and threats. It was under the umbrella of British protection that these autocratic princes walked with all their grandeur and dignity. The princes were a useful tool in the over-all imperial design and as the natural allies of the British rulers; they willingly supported their patrons in times of crisis either because of war or the intense nationalist mobilisation.

19.2 THE EVOLUTION OF PRINCELY ORDER

The form of government in these states was monarchical and the general perception of the British administrators as well as their nationalist opponents was that they were tradition-bound, unchanging, disinterested in progress where 'oriental despots' stood in the way of modernisation and social change. Prior to the revolt of 1857, many British administrators, under the influence of evangelical and utilitarian ideas, were disdainful of the princes. These 'feudal remnants' were seen as a hindrance in the reform of indigenous society and institutions. They were not more than a cesspool of corruption and socio-economic stagnation and symbols of 'oriental despotism'. However, after the revolt, their timely support

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(especially by the rulers of Mysore, Patiala and Hyderabad strengthened their claims as the trusted and faithful military, administrative and political allies of the British rule. The perception of British administrators underwent a shift, and the princes became the 'natural leaders' of Indian society. They were also rewarded in the form of ceremonial rewards and even material treasure in the form of additional territories in some cases. The British rulers solemnly affirmed their protection and the right to perpetual existence. Assurances were given to the princes that their dynasties would not be allowed to lapse for want of the natural heirs. Queen Victoria proclaimed that 'all Treaties and Engagements made with them by or under the authority of the Honourable East India Company are by us accepted and will be scrupulously observed' and further that 'We desire no extension of our present Territorial Possessions' and 'We shall respect the rights, dignity and honour of the native princes as our own'.

19.3 BASIC FEATURES OF AUTOCRACIES IN THE PRINCELY STATES

The princely states were vast assortment of states differing in size, composition and resources. A popular perception about them, reinforced by the colonial stereotypes, is one of elephant-riding *maharajas* enjoying the company of dancing girls. However, a basic aspect of their autocracy was existence of feudal order within all of them. The colonial ethnographic accounts depicted India as a society that privileged the traditional and rustic over urban and modern. As the East was seen as a storehouse of ancient traditions, colourful rites, majestic spectacles and archaic knowledge, if it had any knowledge at all, so also the princes were seen as representing an old clan-based polity. There were hardly any princes who fit into this kind of stereotype. The sovereignty of the princes was not autonomous as there was constant imperial surveillance, interference and pressures from the paramount power, the British, which determined the form this autocracy was to take and how the old *durbari* system will work in a princely state. The princes no longer enjoyed the old, traditional social protective role without the mediation of the paramount power. The autocracy of the prince was indirectly despotism of the British officials who controlled the state apparatus through many ingenious devices and mechanisms. If at all the prince had power, it was to patrol the hunting range, or the *sikargah*.

Most of the princely states had autocratic rule where powers was concentrated in the hands of rulers or their favourites appointed in the patrimonial administration. The burden of land revenue was generally much higher in the princely states compared to British administration and this was linked to their administrative machinery. The rulers generally enjoyed supreme control over the state revenues for their own personal use, often leading to ostentatious living. In some states, the rulers shared powers with the *jagirdars* or feudal aristocrats, who controlled the landed resources because they were relatives and supporters of the rulers or both. These feudal elements enjoyed varying degree of authority and power and the ordinary peasants and cultivators had no voice in the administration. The feudal lords not only collected and retained the land revenues from their respective estates but also had limited police and magisterial powers within their estates. In Alwar state, for instance, the *jagirdars*, who had kinship relations with the ruler, controlled about 1/3rd fertile lands in the Southern parts of the state. The *jagirdars* also held administrative positions. The ruler and these feudal chiefs reinforced

each other's position. During Raja Banni Singh's rule (1815-57) in Alwar, outside Muslim officials trained in British method of administration were appointed, leading to a conflict between the *jagirdars* and this new class of administrators. In Hyderabad, the Nizam's own estate or *sarf khas* comprised of about 10% of the total area of the state and income from this was used to meet the expenses of the royal house. Another major chunk of land-resources (about 30%) was under the control of *jagirdars* of various categories. Oppressive practices like *vethi* (a kind of *begar* or unpaid labour service) and illegal *abwabs* or illegal taxes of many kinds were quite common in many of the princely states.

The feudal chiefs and the landed magnates were the main supporters of the princely autocracies who shored up the authority and powers of the princes, although some 'enlightened' rulers and their ministers did try to introduce reform in the administration and system of taxation. Such reforms too were basically more concerned about efficient handling of governmental functioning like collection of taxes, the maintenance of law and order and the provision of some limited public services like transportation, communication and education. There was hardly any attempt to introduce democratic accountability in the functioning of the government.

The princely states were generally run on laws that were a combination of enactment based on the British Indian legal codes and personal decrees and orders of the rulers. The element of arbitrariness was so significant that such decrees could be withdrawn or modified at the discretion of the prince any time. There was no institutional check on the arbitrary powers enjoyed by the princes within their own territories. They could freely use whatever force the British allowed them to keep against their subjects. The coercive apparatus of the state was generally small but quite effective in the circumstances where people were disarmed. To give you an idea of the strength of a ruler's police and military apparatus, we can see the figures for the Patiala state. It had a territory of about 5,412 square miles and its armed police, trained by a British police officer, had 1,600 men. Its small army consisted of about 1,200 infantry soldiers, 450 cavalrymen and another 210 men in command of artillery.

19.4 INITIATIVES FOR DEMOCRATISATION FROM ABOVE

Some princes introduced representative assemblies in their states, although these were not truly speaking modern democratic institutions with accountability. Mysore was the first princely state to inaugurate a representative assembly in 1881. Subsequently a legislative council or upper house was added in 1907. Similarly Travancore launched a similar nominated legislative council in 1888 and created an elective consultative assembly (although with a majority of appointed official members) in 1904. Baroda also had a representative assembly from 1907. Most of these bodies, however, lacked a real popular representative character and even did not had a modicum of accountability as the majority of members of these bodies were the trusted officials appointed by the rulers. The other states with such bodies were Bhopal, Gwalior, Hyderabad, Cochin, Datia and Pudukkottai. Such assemblies were basically advisory in functions. In states with a reputation of being modern, the *diwan* or the chief minister of the state chaired their sessions. In others, the ruler moderated, as occurred in Datia in

1929 or Gwalior where, the *maharani*, a regent for the minor heir, assumed control. Where the ruler presided over the assembly, it resembled a medieval *durbar* in which the elites presented their grievances but had no legal authority to influence the outcome of the policy. Some states introduced a limited franchise. During 1930s, for example, in Travancore and Cochin, about 5% of the population could vote for the assemblies. Most of these assemblies, however, did not control the budgets or have the right to initiate legislation. In exceptional cases when an assembly acquired such restricted powers to influence budget and legislation, as was the case in Mysore in later years, the ruler could still authorize expenditures or legislation in 'emergencies'. As the resources they managed were so restricted, these assemblies never became the focus for popular political activity.

19.5 POLITICAL MOBILISATION IN PRINCELY STATES AS A TOOL OF DEMOCRATISATION

The political mobilisation in the princely states passed through three distinct phases. In the first stage, the mobilisation was centred on some specific local grievances such as employment of too many 'foreigners' or outsiders in the administrative services of the state and a lack of freedom of press and assembly. The newly emergent urban literate groups were behind this kind of demands and petitioning was the principal mode of the articulation of the demands at this stage. This phase is discernible in Travancore in late nineteenth century although in other states its visibility is seen in 1910s and 1920s. During the 1910s the urban educated subjects of the princely states formed the *praja mandal* or *lok parishads* in some states. Generally the persons educated in British India were behind such moves. The princely states generally lagged behind the British territories in post-secondary education and sometimes these political agitators were based in British territories if the repression of the prince on the political activities was severe. The main demands of these early agitators were greater recruitment of the state's subject in government employment, the guarantee of civil liberties especially the freedom of press, assembly, an association, and in a few instances even the establishment of representative assembly in the state. Seldom did they question the legitimacy of the princely order or demand its outright abolition. *Praja mandal* leaders usually attributed political oppression in the states not to the princes but to the authoritarian or corrupt officials, frequently outsiders or sometimes the scheming *zenana* women or their advisors. Praja Mithra Mandali (1917) of Mysore was perhaps the first such early organisation. Others of similar kind soon emerged in other states such as Baroda, Bhor, and Indore. The Kathiawad Rajkiya Parishad (1921) and the Deccan State Subject's Conference were also similar organisations.

The second stage emerged in the late 1920s and first half of the 1930s. Now the petitioning leads to direct confrontation and public protests in the form of street demonstrations by the literate urban class of people. The main demand now is greater popular representation and the legal right to form political associations. Such organisations emerged in Bhavanagar, Gondal, Junagarh and most Rajputana states in 1920s and 1930s. In Punjab, The Punjab Riyasati Praja Mandal was formed. By the second half of the 1920s, a more active phase of agitation begun in many states. There were demonstrations and public protests in the form of marches. The educated groups demanded now representative and increasingly responsible government that would diminish princely autocracy but not deny

princely authority. They also asked for widening of franchises for the representative assemblies; and selection of elected members of the legislative councils as ministers. This clearly was an indication of rising democratic aspiration of people in the states after the experiment of Popular Congress Rule in nine British provinces (1937-39). Another major demand was privy purses to check arbitrary expenditure of the rulers and increased funding of social infrastructure especially in the field of education and health. Such organisations further demanded recognition of *praja mandals* as legitimate organisations and release of political prisoners arrested during public protests in the states.

In the third phase, peasant mobilisation emerged and became the prominent feature of second half of 1930s and 1940s on the whole. In fact peasant based movements developed simultaneously. They went side by side with the urban educated middle class mobilisation but there were not much direct organisational linkages of the peasant protests with the urban politics. In the rural areas, middle caste peasants generated the most vocal supporters of the protest movement. There were peasant and tribal movements against the *jagirdars* of Bijolia in 1920s in Udaipur. The main issues were the arbitrary taxes, feudal cesses and *begar* or unpaid labour service. The Jat Kisan sabhas of 1930s in Rajputana states, however, also focussed their attention apart from economic grievances, on the questions of ritual status and challenged the Rajput's prerogatives of riding on elephants, horse and camels. The major challenge for the political leadership in the princely states was to broaden its popular base, coordinate their efforts with the political associations in British India and to achieve some leverage with the rulers. It was also a major challenge for them to bridge the gap between the urban and rural movements and to overcome the narrow exclusive boundaries of caste and religious communities in their mobilisation so as to forge the people as citizens.

One thing has to be made clear here. The Indian National Congress, representing the broad democratic spectrum of opinion in the country, after a brief flirtation with the princes as their financial benefactors during the 1880s, had consciously distanced itself from the princes as well as from the political mobilisation in the princely states. This strategy of non-interference continued even with the coming of spectacular mass mobilisation in the early Gandhian phase. There were perhaps some weighty issues that were responsible for such an approach of non-interference in the politics of princely states. First were the constraints of resources at the disposal of Congress. Secondly, the nationalist leadership did not want to fight simultaneously at two fronts because it was aware that princes existed only due to protection of the paramount power of the British. Thirdly, Congress leadership was aware that the movements in princely states were linked to the appeals based on class, religious and linguistic identities and could result in more regional and religious fragmentation. However, while generally not allowing strife around class issues, Gandhian leadership permitted 'constructive work' such as anti-untouchablity in the states. Gandhi actively supported the Vaikom Satyagarha in Travancore in 1925, where the demand for the opening of the road around Vaikom temple for the use of 'untouchables' was raised.

The advance of national movement in British India and resultant increase in the political consciousness of the people also had its share of impact on the princely states. From the very beginning, national movement became synonymous with the march of democracy and demand for a responsible government. The impact of Non-Cooperation movement in the beginning of 1920s was felt in the states

when *praja mandals* (states' people's conferences) appeared in some of them. The democratic aspirations of people in princely states assumed a concrete organisational form in December, 1927, when at the initiative of leaders from states like Balwantrai Mehta, Maniklal Kothari and G. R. Abhyankar, the All-India States' People's Conference was convened. It was attended by 700 activists from the various states. The Congress had passed a resolution at Nagpur Congress Session (1920) asking the princes to grant democratic government to their subjects. The Congress also allowed persons from states to join the Congress organisation as its primary members. But Congress also made it conditional with rider that Congress members in the states could not take part in any political activity in the states as Congressmen or in the name of Congress but only in either in their private capacity, as individuals, or as members of the local political associations. The stress was that the state subjects should develop their own organisations and should not look to outside support. However, the informal relation between nationalist organisation and local *praja mandals* existed and paved the way for more intense mobilisation patterns in the states in subsequent phases. Nehru, representing a leftward shift in the priorities of Congress declared in Lahore Session of the Congress (1929) that the fate of states was linked with the rest of India and that only the people of states would have right to determine the political future of the states.

The situation in the princely states was changing dramatically in the 1930s. Firstly, the Government of India Act (1935) conceived of a plan of federation in which the Indian states were to be brought into a direct constitutional relationship with the British India and the states were to send representatives to the Federal Legislature. The Scheme was undemocratic as it had provision that states' representatives would be nominated by their rulers, not democratically elected. This was to ensure that nationalist representatives would be always in minority. Although this part of the Act was never implemented, both Congress and the All-India States' People's Conference opposed the move and demanded that all representatives for the Federal Legislature should be on the basis of a popular elective principle. Secondly, the assumption of offices by the Congress in the majority of provinces of British India in 1937 had an electrifying impact on the popular participation in the political processes, both in British Indian territories and the states. Thirdly, the left-oriented Congress was under the spell of radical leaders such as Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose in the 1930s and the Congress Socialist Party was demanding a more radical policy in the princely states. The *praja mandal* movements mushroomed in most states as we illustrate with example of Orissa *garjat* states below.

19.6 THE PRAJA MANDALS IN ORISSA GARJAT STATES IN 1930s

The *praja mandal* movement in the *garjat* states was basically a peasant movement which was an epoch-making struggle that considerably influenced the politics of the province as well as the nation. There were 26 *garjats* or, feudatory states of Orissa and it took twelve years after the formation of the province to merge those states with Orissa. The movement, which initially was directed against the misrule and autocracy of the rulers, subsequently demanded responsible government and the merger of the states with Orissa. The attempt to organize the people of the feudatory states took real shape during the Civil

Disobedience Movement, when the First All Orissa States People Conference was organised at Cuttack in 1931. The organisation that went into hibernation soon after its formation was revived again in 1937, with the efforts of Sarangadhar Das, known as 'Garjat Gandhi' in the *garjats*. The second session of the All Orissa States People's Conference was held at Cuttack on 23rd June 1937. The conference declared its objective as the attainment of responsible government. It also exposed the exploitative character of the *garjat* administration and urged upon the rulers to remove the grievances of the people. The conference provided the impetus to the people of the *garjats* and thus in almost all the states the people formed *praja mandals*. Through this organisation, they put up before the rulers their demand lists, which included the abolition of numerous feudal exactions and restoration of civil liberties. The feudatory rulers saw the *praja mandals* as real danger to their authority. They not only refused recognition to this organisation but adopted several repressive measures to restrict their activities. The first popular agitation against the *garjat* administration was witnessed in the state of Nilgiri, a small state in the border of Balasore. The punitive action of the ruler of Nilgiri on the people of the villages incited the people and on 2nd May 1938, disturbances started in Nilgiri. The people under the leadership of Kailash Chandra Mohanty and Banamali Das pressed the ruler to yield to their demands, which included the recognition of their civil liberties and removal of unjust laws. Brutal and repressive measures adopted by the ruler to calm down the agitation failed to dislodge the people. Ultimately a compromise was made through the mediation of H.K. Mahtab.

Talcher and Dhenkanal were the two other *garjat* states, where the activities of the *praja mandal* created troubles for the ruling chiefs. The Talcher *praja mandal* movement attracted the attention of national leaders, for it adopted a novel measure to fight against the ruler. The repressive measures of the ruler compelled the people of Talcher to adopt a new form of passive resistance and they left their homes and moved to the neighbouring areas of Angul, in British Orissa. It was estimated by the *praja mandal* leaders that about 60 thousand people out of the total population of 86 thousand had left their homes and taken shelter in the temporary camps. The mass migration of the people, their plight in the camps, who stayed there for long 8 months, was an innovative way of getting into the political arena. In the state of Dhenkanal, a reign of terror was instituted by the ruling chief to suppress the *praja mandal*, which had started its agitation against the reign of tyranny in Dhenkanal. However, the most tragic incident that shocked the people and represented the police repression in severe form was committed in the villages of Bhuban and Nilakanthapur at the night of 10-11 October 1938. There, the police party attacked the innocent villagers and killed six persons. This sort of wanton repression not only invited condemnation but it also strengthened the determination of the people to fight for the fulfilment of their just demands. In the *garjat* states of Athagarh, Baramba, Narsinghpur, Nayagarh and Tigiria the people raised their voice under the aegis of their *praja mandal* units. The popular agitation in Ranpur assumed a violent character. On 5th June 1939, the people gheraoed the royal palace and pressed for the release of their arrested leaders. Major R.L. Bazelgette, the political agent, who was present on the spot, without heeding to the people's demands, ordered the crowd to disperse. To frighten the crowd he fired a few shots. This infuriated the crowd and in their retaliatory attack Major Bazelgette was killed. In the wake of this, police repression started in Ranpur. Many people were arrested, some fled to the

neighbouring areas. Finally two persons Raghunath Mohanty and Dibakar Parida were hanged and others suffered exile and life imprisonment.

Such development brought about a sea-change in Congress policy towards these movements. The Congress at its Tripuri Session (1939) passed a resolution enunciating new tactics. It removed the earlier restraint on the Congress activities in the states. Now there was greater identification between the Congress and the *praja mandals*. In 1939, Jawaharlal Nehru was elected as the president of the All-India States' People's Conference, a step that marked the merger of the two streams of democratic movement in princely states and British India. As a result of this, unlike previous movements, the impact of Quit India movement was felt more uniformly in the princely states and the British Indian territories.

19.7 DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS OF THE MASSES ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

It appears on surface that Indian states were merged in the Indian Union after 1947 using coercive means by Sardar Patel. But the coercion was often backed by popular democratic aspirations of the masses as we will see in the case of Hyderabad and Kashmir, the states where force was used.

19.7.1 Democratic Struggle in Hyderabad

Congress had launched a Satyagarha in Hyderabad in 1938 under the leadership of Swami Ramtirth. It was not much successful. Around the same time, The Communists entered the Andhra Maha Sabha and using the linguistic identity demand and agrarian anti-feudal reforms, gained some influence. The Communal organisations, Itihad-ul-Muslimin and the Hindu Maha Sabha, both tried to polarize people along religious lines around the same period. Gandhi had asked Swami Ramtirth in 1942 to begin a Satyagraha as soon as a similar struggle was launched in British Indian territories by the Congress. While Congress tried to widen the social base of its movement in Hyderabad through State Peoples' Conference, the Communist used the Andhra Maha Sabha as their front organisation and made use of Telugu language question and land–reform, simultaneously demanding end of Nizam's autocratic rule. Nizam tried to curtail any kind of democratic and civil rights in their state in 1940s. The State also tried to portray the genuine democratic demands of State Congress as those of 'Hindus' in order to get the sympathy of Muslim masses and there were communal conflict on some occasions. Realising that it was not possible to merge with Pakistan, due to geographical reasons as well as political disliking of Nizam for Jinnah, the state's ruler was dreaming of keeping Hyderabad a separate sovereign state.

Swami Ramtirth and other Congress leaders began a Satyagraha in August 1947 for the merger of Hyderabad in India. The Communists had organised an anti-landlord and anti- Nizam campaign in Telangana region since 1944. Ravi Narayan Reddy played a crucial role in this popular struggle as the leader of Andhra Maha Sabha. Nizam tried to suppress it but it assumed mass dimension by 1946 and despite a ban on the Communist organisation by the Nizam's Government in December 1946, there was an informal and temporary alliance between State Congress and Communists, although it contained seeds of an ideological conflict as well. The armed takeover of Hyderabad through 'Operation Polo' by the Indian

troops in September 1948 was celebrated as a democratic step by the people of Hyderabad state.

19.7.2 Democratisation in Jammu and Kashmir

In October, 1932, a Muslim Conference was established in Srinagar under the leadership of Sheikh Abddullah. Its aim was to fight for the democratic rights of Muslims, their socio-economic and cultural progress, lowering of land revenue demand, and adequate representation to Muslims in state services etc. Maharaja Hari Singh had established a legislative assembly known as the '*Praja Sabha*' in the state in 1934. It was not a truly representative assembly and in no way created a democratic and accountable system of government in Jammu and Kashmir. There was provision of separate Communal electorate in the elections to the assembly and elected members were always in a minority. Only about 3% people got franchise under this constitution. The assembly could legislate only on subjects allowed by the autocratic Maharaja and although it could discuss and put resolution on budget, it had no power to alter budget proposals. Sheikh Abdullah renamed his organisation as National Conference. It was more than a symbolic gesture as he was moving towards secular democratic ideology. He was close to local Congress leader Premnath Bajaj. He also came in contact with Jawaharlal Nehru and started stressing social and economic issues like agrarian reforms more than religious issues.

Under the pressure of democratic demands of National Conference, Maharaja Hari Singh amended the constitution of legislative assembly in 1939. Now the elected members could be in majority in the assembly, although the separate communal electorates and system of nominated membership in assembly were retained. Meanwhile the communal polarisation became sharper in the state with revival of conservative, and communal based Muslim Conference. In 1944, Maharaja included two members of the assembly in his ministry, one Hindu and One Muslim. Mirza Afjal Beg, the deputy leader of National Conference in assembly became the minister of Public Works department but it was a short lived arrangement. Mirza Beg resigned from his post in March, 1946. National Conference launched a 'Quit Kashmir' Movement in 1946 with a demand to end the autocratic rule of Maharaja in Kashmir and to include peoples' representatives in the constitution-making process. For this National Conference gave a petition to the Cabinet Mission to give right to the people of Kashmir to send delegates to Constituent Assembly. Many leaders of the National Conference including Sheikh Abdullah were arrested and sent to jails. The main demands of National Conference at this juncture were:

1) Right to frame Constitution for the autonomous socio-political units of federal Indian Union.
2) Right of the people of the states to self-determination on the basis of nationality.
3) Recognition of the right of people of a state to cultural identity.
4) Right of people of a state to merge or stay away from Indian Union in future.
5) Right to a state to leave the Federation even after merging with it.

However, main contention of Sheikh Abdullah at this point of time was that it should struggle against the proposal of Cabinet Mission to leave right to send representatives in the Constituent Assembly to the rulers. He argued that

democratic struggle of people against state's autocracy was part of anti-imperialist struggle because the princely order was a creation of British rule and it must end with the coming of Independence. There were protests in many parts of Jammu and Kashmir against the arrest of leaders of National Conference. Nehru and All-India States' peoples' Conference supported the movement in Kashmir. Contrary to this the Muslim Conference had started supporting the creation of Pakistan and weaning away Muslim people for a communal agenda. The influence of Muslim Conference grew in the absence of National Conference leaders and when they were finally released, armed intrusion of Pakistan had already begun. It was under these circumstances that Maharaja Hari Singh asked for Indian help and decided merger with India. The merger paved the way for establishment of a democratic government for which Congress and National Conference has been struggling for long.

19.8 SUMMARY

We have seen how the princely states came into being as feudal appendage of an Imperial design. Initially Congress did not intervene in the political processes within the states. However, mass democratic associations of people developed in the states in the form of *paraja mandals* and they expanded their influence by advocating democratic reforms and civil liberties in the states that were governed by autocratic rulers. By late 1930s Congress supported the democratic aspirations of the people in princely state and *praja mnadals* organised a number of anti-feudal agitations in many of the states and simultaneously demanded creation of representative assemblies and a responsible government. The process of democratisation gained momentum in 1940s when it became clear that country was moving towards Independence. The ease of integration and merger of the states into Indian Union, with minimal use of coercion in the process, was due to fact that political mobilisation had already been under way in most of the states.

19.9 EXERCISES

1) Describe the nature of the princely states in British India.

2) Discuss the various forms of democratisation movement undertaken by people in the princely states.

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MHI-09
Indian National Movement

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Block

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QUIT INDIA AND ITS AFTERMATH

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BLOCK 5 QUIT INDIA AND ITS AFTERMATH

Introduction

The one-sided inclusion of India in 1939 by the British on the side of the Allied Forces and against the Axis Powers invited sharp reaction from the Indian nationalist leadership. Such declaration by the colonial rulers on behalf of India without consulting the Indian leaders was considered extremely autocratic and prejudicial to Indian interests. The Congress ministries resigned in protest. The Congress took the position that Indians should be consulted before taking such a momentous decision on their behalf. Moreover, the Congress, the Socialists and the Communists at this stage were against India's participation in an imperialist war. The Congress, following Gandhi, also started 'individual satyagraha' to register its protests. To assuage the Indian feelings, the British government sent the Cripps Mission whose proposals were also rejected by the Congress. This set the stage for a wider confrontation between the nationalists and the colonial government. **Unit 20** discusses these issues in detail.

Quit India movement was launched on 8th August 1942 by Mahatma Gandhi to end the colonial rule. It was one of the biggest nationalist upsurges against imperialism. The arrest of almost entire top leadership did not deter people from attacking the government institutions in many parts of India. In several places, the administration was taken over by the agitationists who had expelled or subdued the colonial police and administration. Urban groups, peasants, and even industrial workers had jointed the movement in huge numbers. Even in the absence of clear directive from the apex nationalist leadership, the people in most of India interpreted the nationalist ideas in their own ways and acted accordingly. This has also been suggested that the militancy of the Quit India Movement partly owed to the fact that the people were themselves in command and not organised by the Congress leaders. You will find deliberations on these matters in **Unit 21**.

Although the end of the Second World War brought relief all round, the situation in India was not quiescent. Inflation, food scarcity and famines had resulted from the forced inclusion of India into British war efforts and exploitation of its resources. Moreover, the demands of the Indian nationalists for independence were not considered by the British government. The resentment against foreign rule had further intensified in the wake of the Quit India and the severe repression by the colonial government. The trial of the INA soldiers who had fought against the British forces during the War resulted in another round of confrontation between the Indian people and the imperialist government. There were large-scale protests against the trials of INA prisoners. Around the same time, there occurred a revolt among the naval ratings against bad conditions of work and mistreatment by British officers. This RIN mutiny was support by large sections of people, and naval ratings in many parts of India also went on strike in support of their colleagues. Besides these, there occurred many peasant and tribal uprisings on various issues. There was a general disenchantment with the colonial rule and it was quite apparent that its end was rather near. However, this period also witnessed serious communal divide with Muslim League posing as the sole representative of the Muslims in India. The election results in 1946 also confirmed the fact of communal political fracture. **Unit 22** will familiarise you with these developments.

As it was becoming clear that the British intended to leave India, the modalities of future government became a matter of concern for all political parties. The British government also desired to retain India in the Commonwealth after their rule ended. For this purpose, the Viceroy, Wavell, called the Simla Conference in 1945. However, the pulls from various political interests marred the Conference. Later, the Cabinet Mission proposals, suggesting loose federation, did not find acceptance with the Congress. Meanwhile, the Muslim League saw it as an opportunity to vociferously demand Pakistan. It went to extreme lengths in voicing its demand for the creation of Pakistan. The call of 'Direct Action' given by Jinnah on 16 August 1946 saw thousands of people dying subsequently in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar. Description of these developments you will find in **Unit 23**.

In **Unit 24**, you will find the politics centred around the last days of the British in India. Totally unconciliatory and disruptionist attitude of the Muslim League during the period of the Interim Government discounted the possibility of a long-term cooperation between Congress and League. The failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan led towards acceptance of the partition of the country which the last viceroy, Mountbatten, announced. To avoid the communal bloodshed, the Congress accepted this partition. However, the biggest tragedy was still to be played out in Punjab where millions were displaced, lakhs killed and a very large number of women faced kidnapping and violation and mutilation of their bodies. India became independent on 15 August 1947. However, the joy of freedom was mixed with the sense of loss, of partition of the country and of the untold brutalities wrought on human beings.

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UNIT 20 PRELUDE TO QUIT INDIA*

Structure

20.1 Introduction

20.2 Political Situation in India 1930-39 – A Background

20.3 British Imperial Strategy in India

20.4 Resignation of Ministries

20.5 Individual Satyagraha

20.6 Cripps Mission

20.7 Summary

20.8 Exercises

20.1 INTRODUCTION

At the very outset of the World War II in September 1939, it became evident that India would be in the forefront of the liberation struggle by the subject countries. In fact, support to Britain in its war efforts rested on the assurance by the former that India would be freed from British subjection after the war. Imperial strategy as it was shaped in Britain was still stiff and rigid. Winston Churchill who succeeded Neville Chamberlain as the Prime Minister of Britain on 10 May 1940, declared that the aim of the war was, "victory, victory at all costs… for without victory, there is no survival… no survival for the British Empire…". (Madhushree Mukerjee, 2010, p.3.) More than ever before, the mainstream political parties of India had to make their moves on the basis of both national politics and international developments. It is in this context that the Quit India Movement of 1942 heralded one of the most tumultuous phases in the history of the Indian national movement. The developments leading up to it were also momentous because of their long term ramification. In the course of this Unit, we will establish the pulls and pressures working on mainstream Indian politics and their regional manifestations prior to the beginning of the Quit India Movement of 1942. We will also see the extent to which the imperial state steered the course of these developments and how different groups in the political mainstream perceived and interpreted them.

20.2 POLITICAL SITUATION IN INDIA 1930-39 – A BACKGROUND

The nationalist offensive in the form of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the summer of 1930 [see **Box-1** for a summary of these activities] had compelled the government to enter into negotiations in the first session of the Round Table Conference held in London from November 1930 to January 1931. The Congress had kept aloof from it. However, when the government yielded some ground to the Indian businessmen by imposing a surcharge of 5% on cotton piece goods imports, and thus came to grant some protection to the Indian mercantile interests, the former put pressure on Gandhi to negotiate with the government. In the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 1931, Mahatma Gandhi came to accept Viceroy

* Resource Person: Dr. Srimanjari

Irwin's proposals and temporarily withdrew the movement. As per the conditions of the Pact, thousands of prisoners jailed during the Civil Disobedience were to be released. While the bargaining power of the Congress was clearly evident in this move, there was widespread disquiet at the withdrawal of the movement. A sense of betrayal, particularly among the youth, because young revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed on 23 March 1931 without Gandhi seeking any reprieve for them, was also palpable.

Box 1

The Civil Disobedience movement (1930-31) had witnessed two waves of struggle in the countryside. Firstly, from the Congress organisation downwards with the mobilisation of peasants through accepted Gandhian forms. Secondly, with the interpretation of the Gandhian message in a less inhibiting manner. From the summer of 1930 to February 1931, 60,000 people were arrested compared to 30,000 during 1920-22. The movement attracted large number of women. Out of 71,453 convicted between January 1932 to February 1933, 3462 were women. The highest number of women arrested were from Bombay, Bengal and UP. Following the withdrawal of the movement and subsequent to the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi in 1932, there was widespread rural discontentment in different parts of the country. David Hardiman's study of peasant agitations in Gujarat has shown how the dominant caste of Patidar peasantry who had emerged as Congress loyalists since the Non-Cooperation Movement defied the Congress and continued a no-revenue campaign in some of the villages till 1934 (David Hardiman, 2004) In Bihar, the Kisan Sabhas had to accept a more radical agrarian programme to match the grievances of the tenants. This was particularly the case after the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in April 1934. In the neighbouring region of UP, growing peasant distress and protest pushed the Congress to publish a report *on Agrarian Distress in the UP* in 1931 (Gyanendra Pandey, 2004). In N.W.F.P, the popularity of the *Khudai Khidmatgar* or the Red Shirt Movement grew in close unison with the popularity of the Congress. Compared with the discontentment among the peasantry, the mill-workers remained relatively aloof during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

This was the time when the radical nationalists and Nehru contemplated building alternatives to the Gandhian anti-imperialist programme and strategy. The Left groups had begun to intervene in strikes from 1929 and were also functioning through the Workers and Peasant Parties (WPPs). The Trade Disputes Act of 1929 made strike a punishable offence. After a period of relative isolation when the Communists worked through the WPPs, the group grew in strength because the Left gained from the new Communist International strategy of organising a broad anti-imperialist movement of the working-class, peasantry and the middle-class through the consolidation of the Left and other likeminded groups both within and outside the Congress. However, there was a lull in mainstream Indian politics following the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement at the time of the Round Table Conference (September – December 1931). In contrast to this, there was an increase in revolutionary nationalism in the years preceding the passing of the 1935 Act. In Bengal, rise in individual acts of violence against officials saw an increase in participation of women in such activities. The assassination of B. Stevens, the District Magistrate of Tippera on 14 December

1932 by two school girls, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chaudhury, exemplifies this. As such activities spread to towns and cities like Chittagong (east Bengal, now in Bangladesh), the Government adopted repressive measures to contain them. There were other developments as well, for instance the increasing mobilisation of Hindus and Muslims along communal lines. The Congress Report on the 1931 (Kanpur) Riot showed how a sense of unease had affected relations between the two communities and had affected the public space commonly shared by these communities. It was precisely in the years after 1931 that Mahatma Gandhi's differences with Bhim Rao Ambedkar on the issue of the grant of the Communal Award grew acute. In 1933-34 Gandhi undertook fasts, campaigned against untouchability and formed the Harijan Sevak Sangh. That the imperial government was breaking the back of the national movement was evident when it supported the anti-reform groups and defeated the Temple Entry Bill in the Legislative Assembly in August 1934. It is in the background of these developments that we need to briefly discuss the 1935 Provincial Autonomy Act of 1935.

From 1920 Congress had rejected devolution by stages and demanded immediate *Swaraj* and in 1929 *Poorna Swaraj* or complete independence and sovereignty. The Nehru Report of 1928 had envisaged a unitary constitution rather than a federal one. However, this vision was not shared by two groups whom the imperial authorities claimed they were obliged to protect – the princes and the Muslim minority of British India. The British statesmen had never encouraged the princely states to bring their states into constitutional harmony with the provinces. Thus these states had constantly sought an assurance that the imperial authority would never transfer its paramount power to a responsible Indianised central authority. If the princes sought exclusion, as far as British India is considered by the late 1920s Muslim leaders subscribed to a strong-province-but-weak-federation strategy. By the time of the decennial revision of the constitution of the 1919 Act, the princes had emerged as opponents of a fully responsible self-governing Dominion, and the Muslim League as the opponent of a unitary self-governing British India. At the same time, on the basis of claims of upholding constitutional and social heterogeneity, Britain was also unprepared to recognise Congress as the representative of India at large, nor to accept the possibility of India providing for its own defence, nor to jettison its own financial and commercial interests. With the Congress stiffening its position, Raj looked to the minorities and the princes to help with the work of constitutional devolution (D.A. Low, 2004, p. 381). The Government of India Act 1935, also known as the Provincial Autonomy Act, was the result of such endeavours. In brief, the 1935 Act provided for central responsibility within a strong federation. However, defence and political relations were 'reserved' subjects and therefore under imperial control. Subjects such as finance, the civil services, commerce, the minorities and the safety, stability and interest of British India were subject to imperial safeguards. While the imperial authorities hailed the 1935 Act, and the ministries were formed after the 1937 elections as a significant step towards the goal of responsible government, it actually contributed to disunity.

The Congress and the Muslim League continued to denounce certain eventualities embodied in the 1935 Act. The idea of federation, central to the Act, was one such eventuality. Federation would have come into operation only if the Indian princely states agreed to join the Indian federation. This had given these states an opportunity to haggle with the centre over the terms of entry. Even under the existing clauses of the 1935 Act these states were to continue to enjoy substantial

representation in the Lower House (Federal Assembly) and the Upper House. The princes enjoyed the prerogative of appointing their representatives to the legislature. This would have deprived the 81 million States people living under their absolute domain of any representation. Thus feudal despotism was to continue without any compulsion on the princely states to introduce any reforms to curtail their unbridled power over their subjects. There was no provision in the 1935 Act for voting in the Native States. Till 1935, the Congress had been by and large non-interventionist in the affairs of these states. Encouraged by the Praja Mandal groups, which were spearheading the state-subjects movement in states like Baroda, the Congress now sought a more responsible government in the princely states. In the Provinces, property requirements limited the total vote to 150,000 people. *Only 150,000 were to vote out of a total population of 365 millions!* The seats in the Legislature were divided along communal lines. The Congress was particularly disturbed by the fact that there were special seats for communal minorities in addition to general seats. Muslims, Sikhs, Scheduled Castes, Christians, *etc.*, were to have separate elections. Each territorial constituency was split up into communal groupings when voting took place. Thus for the Congress the 1935 Act harmonised well with the British 'divide and rule' traditions. Mahatma Gandhi's Civil-Disobedience Movement which was directed primarily against separate electorates had been overlooked by the framers of the Government of India Act, 1935. Federal finances would have also tightened the noose around provincial necks. Over 80% of the Federal budget was non-votable and outside Legislative control. 90% of Federal revenue was to be drained from the British provinces; only 10% from the princely states. The revenue flow provided for would have been directed toward the central government and would have left the provinces responsible for the upkeep of the various public services. Thus there was deep resentment in some sections of the Indian political circles about the inefficacy of the 1935 Act in politically and economically empowering Indians. In their opinion the Act would have allowed the growth of Indian economy to remain stunted and undeveloped. The illiteracy, disease and poverty of the people would have also continued to be as rampant as they had been.

The participation of the Congress and the Muslim League in the 1937 elections and the formation of Provincial Ministries after the elections, however, highlighted both, the political ambitions of these parties and the introduction of a new element in the protracted debate that had begun as early as the formation of the INC itself regarding the relevance of the 'constitutional way' on the road to self government (D.A. Low, 1997). The contest for popular loyalties between the British and the Congress was no longer principally revolved around popular peasant grievances. It was determined in the course of an election campaign and electoral results. The parliamentary road after the success of the 1936-7 elections proved to be very attractive. Even Jawaharlal Nehru in the opinion some scholars was now a partial convert. However, the more radical sections both within and outside the political parties were aspiring for a more popular course of action.

20.3 BRITISH IMPERIAL STRATEGY IN INDIA

World War II began on 3 September 1939. In September 1939 itself, the Viceroy Linlithgow announced that following the beginning of the Second World War (between UK, France, and the USA, i.e., the Allies and Germany which headed the Axis powers) India, which was still an integral part of the British Empire,

was also at war with Germany. Many argued that Linlithgow's declaration of war on India's behalf without consulting the Indian leadership was an autocratic act. Doubts were expressed about whether Britain would keep faith in the political promises made before the outbreak of the war. The main concern of the new Secretary of State for India, Leopold Amery, and the Viceroy of India since 1936, Lord Linlithgow, was how to maximise India's contribution to the war. The question, however, did not elicit a satisfactory response. The political impasse with the Indian nationalists and the war-time expectations of the political parties in India, particularly opportunities for determining the nature of Indian politics in the post-war years, were instrumental in shaping the British imperial policies in India as also the stance of the political parties in India.

As far as Britain is concerned, the advantages of the empire had a definite role to play in policy decisions taken in London. As long as India was a major area of trade and investment, a large contributor to the costs of imperial defence and employed a fairly large number of British civil and military officers, there was an advantage in gradual devolution of power. This was the situation till the 1930s. But since then the relative advantage of the India trade had declined sharply. In 1917, i.e. the year preceding World War I, India imported £ 83.5 million worth of British goods, in 1938 i.e. the year preceding the beginning of World War II, £35 million. Correspondingly, Indian export to Britain was £ 39 million and £41.25 million respectively. By 1939, according to one estimate, India had a favourable balance of trade with Britain. The Lancashire lobby of industrialists had virtually lost its cotton trade with Britain. With considerable 'Indianisation' the civil services were no longer attractive to Britain's youth. The Indian Army remained vital for imperial defence.

World War II drew upon the human and material resources of the colonies on an unprecedented scale. Of all the colonies, India perhaps was the most indispensable. India was essential to Britain's planning of the war. The Indian Army was central to the strategy being followed in the Middle East. In 1939, the British Indian Army consisted of one hundred eighty nine thousand soldiers. By 1945, India had contributed two and a half million men to the British Indian Army; 28,538 to the Royal Indian Air Force; thirty thousand to the Royal Indian Navy; and ten thousand women to the Women's Auxiliary Corps. Recruitment to the armed forces was high because of unemployment. In the course of the war, India emerged as a major production centre for food grains and materials like jute, which was used largely in packing for commercial and military purposes and other military supplies. Once Japan entered the war in 1941, eastern India became a strategic base of operations for the Allied Powers in Southeast Asia. With it began yet another period of hesitant promises by the imperial government to the colonial subjects regarding their political future.

In 1939, the colonial Indian state had to tread extremely carefully to avoid charges of neglect and abandonment of the colonies. Strategic and economic expediency demanded that it heeded some of the concerns of the colonies. The British Indian Government was mainly concerned about the position undertaken by the Congress and the Muslim League. At the very outset of the war in 1939, it became evident that India would be in the forefront of the liberation struggle by the subject countries. In fact, support to Britain in its war efforts hinged on the assurance by the former that India would be freed from British subjection after the war. At the beginning, there was an intense debate across the political spectrum on how

crucial it was to support the war. The debate rested on the position of each political party on domestic and international politics.

The support of these and other political parties in India was vital to the imperial state because the war required the state to make unusual demands on society and to extract greater resources than usual. Since the demands were not justified, a fact that the imperial state was hardly in a position to acknowledge, it wanted to guard against any articulation of Indian nationalist aspirations during the war. It is important to note that at this early stage no political party, except the Forward Bloc – founded by Subhas Chandra Bose and his brother Shishir Bose in 1939 – had voiced its active opposition to the war [see **Box-2**]. Mahatma Gandhi had openly expressed his anxiety at the thought of German bombs falling on London. The relatively uncritical stance of other prominent nationalists during the early stages of the war was to some extent due to the principle of democratic benevolent liberalism in which most of the Congress leaders had been educated. It also had much to do with the intense dislike of Nazi racism (evident in Jawaharlal Nehru's writings). Britain could have capitalised on that qualified support by winning the goodwill of the Congress leaders. However, she failed to do so and devoted all her attention on winning the war. The Indian leadership was reduced to the position of onlookers at an event in which they could play no part.

Box 2

Subhas Chandra Bose was born in 1879 in Orissa. He was educated at Cambridge and joined the ICS. Following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 and Mahatma Gandhi's rise to power in Indian politics, Subhas Bose resigned from his post and joined Congress in 1921. He was imprisoned between 1924 and 1927. He could not rise higher in the Congress Party. After the brief period of exile in Europe he returned to India in 1936. He founded the Forward Bloc in 1939. He was considered a public menace by the authorities in Bengal. He was eventually arrested in 1940. In his powerful and inimitable style he said: "Forget not that the greatest curse for a man is to remain a slave. Forget not that the greatest crime is to compromise with injustice and wrong. Remember the eternal law: you must give life if you want to get it. And remember the highest virtue is to battle against iniquity, no matter what the cost may be". Kept under house arrest soon after, he escaped and travelled to Kabul and thereafter to Berlin. Eventually he was transferred to Japan. When the war moved to East Asia, he was the inspiration behind the Indian National Army (INA) that fought against the British in Burma.

There was a political deadlock at this stage. The talks between the Congress and the Muslim League, held between 16 and 18 October 1939, had failed to make headway. Apart from differences of opinion on the functioning of ministries in different provinces, the basic difference between the two was based on Jinnah's non-acceptance of any conflict with the British Government during the war and Nehru's anti-imperialist stance. As early as July 1939, at the time of impending war in the West, the Congress made its stand clear that it will not support Britain in any 'imperialist' war. When the war began, Gandhi was the only one in the Congress Working Committee who suggested extending unconditional support to the British on a non-violent basis. However, the Congress resolved on 14 September 1939, that the issue of war and peace "must be decided by the Indian

people, and no outside authority can impose this decision upon them, nor can the Indian people permit their resources to be exploited for imperialist ends". In the same resolution the British government was invited "to declare in unequivocal terms, what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new world order that is envisaged; and in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and … be given effect to in the present". The Congress also sought the right of Indians to frame their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly and to participate in the war effort through representations in the Viceroy's Executive Council. A resolution of this nature amounted to demand for immediate political and constitutional concession, something that the British were not willing to concede.

The British government reiterated its offer of Dominion Status after the war on 18 October 1939 but failed to declare its political objectives or war aims. The Viceroy Linlithgow only stated that the British were willing to consult representatives of different communities, parties and interests in India and the Indian princes on the issue of constitutional reforms for India after the war. He also assured the representatives of minorities that full weightage would be given to their views and interests during modification of the British imperial position on the matter. A statement to this effect, did not satisfy the Congress, but bolstered up the Muslim League. Thus the Muslim League Working Committee announced that it empowered M.A. Jinnah, as President of the League, to assure Britain of Muslim support and cooperation during the war. Some scholars are therefore of the view that the outbreak of the war saved the League and made it a representative Muslim body. The contention is that the British deliberately boosted Jinnah's prestige at the all-India level for their war-purpose though at the provincial level they subordinated this objective. This was done to operate the war machine with efficiency (Anita Inder Singh, 1987). Linlithgow also admitted that the government was aware of the 'nuisance value' of the Congress but was still keen to seek its support. In the meantime, the Muslim League in its resolution passed on 18 October 1939, offered its support for the war effort if the Viceroy would accept the League as the only representative body of the Muslims of India. Its contention that India did not constitute a national state because it was composed of various nationalities echoed the British imperialist views since the late nineteenth century. A few days later the Congress Working Committee rejected the offer of Dominion Status after the War for being a continuation of the old imperialist policy and called for the resignation of the Congress provincial ministries.

20.4 RESIGNATION OF MINISTRIES

In December 1939, the Congress withdrew the Ministries from the seven provinces where it had a majority. This was not an easy decision to take, particularly because in the two and a half years of their existence these ministries had exercised to the full the powers that the 1935 Act had granted them. Some of the important measures undertaken by them included educational and agrarian reforms, for instance in Bihar and UP. The question of release of political prisoners like those jailed in the Kakori Conspiracy Case of 1925 was undertaken and hundreds of prisoners were released. The issue had raised considerable flutter in the imperial circles. Because there did exist a working relationship between the British Governor and his Congress Chief Minister, there was a sense of unease

among nationalist leaders like Nehru that the Congress ministries were 'tending to become counter-revolutionary'.

In December 1939 when the Congress ministries handed over their resignation such apprehensions were set aside. This was a major step in the direction of withdrawal of support to the government. But for the next two years the local congressmen continued to contest local board elections. Some scholars like Judith Brown have perceived this as support to the political system by participation in it at the individual level. (Judith Brown, 1984, p.317) These Congress-controlled provinces were now administered by the Governor, who used the special powers allotted under Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. The non-Congress ministries continued to cooperate with the government. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) adopted an anti-war position. The Congress now asked its members to join the war committees only in their individual capacity. The Forward Bloc, formed when Subhas Chandra Bose and his brother Sarat Chandra Bose moved out of the Congress due to acute differences between the former and Mahatma Gandhi at the Tripuri Congress in 1939, was opposed to the war. It continued to be anti-British and anti-imperialist throughout the war. The Communist Party was keen to revive the sagging spirits of the national movement through anti-imperialist struggles during the war. This was the position adopted by the party till the USSR joined the war on the side of the Allied Powers in the summer of 1941.

Earlier the All India Muslim League (AIML) had wanted a complete agreement between Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the main political leader of the party and Viceroy Linlithgow on the issue of dividends before offering unconditional support to Britain. Now the strategy of the Muslim League was to turn the situation to its favour by publicly rejoicing at the development. Jinnah announced that to celebrate the resignation by the Congress Ministries, 22 December 1939 should be declared as the 'Day of Deliverance' and thanks-giving. In this announcement of 2 December, he appealed to the imperial officials "to enquire into the legitimate grievances of the Musalmans and the wrongs done to them by the outgoing Congress Ministry". (C.H. Philips et al 1962, p. 353) The appeal and the fact that the Governors had made such announcements while taking over the government of various provinces under Section 93 of the 1935 Act indicate that the resignation of Congress ministries was used as an opportunity both by the Muslim League and the administration to whip up the issue of maltreatment of minorities in Congress-led provinces.

After the resignation of Congress ministries, the party demanded a new constitution and independence at the Ramgarh session of the party in March 1940. It was on an offensive now. It made it clear in no uncertain terms that, "The recent pronouncements made on behalf of the British Government in regard to India demonstrate that Great Britain is carrying on the war fundamentally for imperialist ends and for the preservation and strengthening of her Empire, which is based on the exploitation of the people of India as well as of other Asiatic and African countries. Under these circumstances, it is clear that the Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, be party to the war, which means continuance and perpetuation of this exploitation" (CH Philips et. al, 1962*;* pp.338-339).This was by far one of the most powerful statements issued out by the Congress. At the same session the Congress also announced a new campaign of non-cooperation and civil disobedience.

India's role in imperial defence changed significantly following the 'blitzkrieg' in Europe in May and June 1949. She was now all the more crucial on account of her resources, her manpower and the economic potential east of Suez. War production now stepped up with inclusion of six more divisions into the British India Army. There was development of aircraft production for the first time in India. On 7 June 1940, Linlithgow launched his plan of pooling the resources and production of the countries of the British Empire in the Indian Ocean with India as its 'natural' centre (Johannes H. Voigt, 2004; p. 356). However, material support from India was not enough. It was equally necessary to keep India politically quiet. By the end of May 1940 Linlithgow asked for the enactment of a Revolutionary Movements Ordinance to give the Government of India emergency powers to deal with any act of political resistance. Thus the imperial strategy at this stage was to be prepared both to crush the Congress by pre-empting any civil disobedience campaign as also to allow administrative concessions in order to avoid political conflict in India. Thus, in August 1940, the Viceroy came up with the 'August offer'. The offer provided encouragement to Muslim separatism. Secondly, it promised that at an 'appropriate time after the war' the British Government would introduce a representative constituent body in India to frame the country's new constitution in accord with dominion precedent. It was observed that this would open the way for the attainment by India 'of that free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth which remains the proclaimed and accepted goal of the Imperial Crown and of the British Parliament' (Nicholas Mansergh, 1971; pp. 338-346).

Thus in August 1940, Linlithgow repeated the offer earlier made to the Indian leaders in October 1939 of a consultative role in the war effort with the promise of dominion status after victory in the war and that a post-war assembly should frame a new constitution. The suggestion was rejected by both the Congress and the League which was now beginning to demand a separate state of Pakistan. In the meantime, Subhas Chandra Bose, who openly questioned the credibility of the empire through his strident anti-war position, proved a greater threat to the British. In fact, after his house arrest and escape to Berlin and his activities thereafter through the formation of the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army), he inspired a following among thousands of fellow-citizens.

20.5 INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHA

The Individual Satyagraha or passive resistance campaign was launched when the Government refused to heed the Congress resolution of lending support to Britain in its war efforts if she would grant the formation of a provisional national government. Mahatma Gandhi on his part was in principle opposed to Indian participation in the war. It may be therefore suggested that there were two strands of opinion in the Congress at this time – those who were prepared to support the war effort but were not ready to compromise on the issue of full independence and 'national government' and Gandhi himself who was perhaps willing to accept a compromise solution on the issue of a national government before the end of the war but was staunchly against India's participation in the war. The suggestion of a civil disobedience campaign brought both the strands of opinion together.

The campaign began in October 1940 and continued till December 1942. It was started mainly to protest peacefully against the war. That the move was not stridently aggressive was evident at the very beginning. Gandhi formulated a protest not against India's war effort as such but against the prohibition to protest against it. The struggle was mainly based on the principle of freedom of speech, not on the principle of non-violence in the circumstances of the war. It was to be a controlled 'individual *satyagraha*' because non-Congress members could not offer it. Replying to a query to this effect, Mahatma Gandhi had replied in March 1941 that Satyagraha could be offered by only those who had become "four anna" (anna is denomination denoting 1/16 of a rupee) members of the Congress and fulfilled other conditions. Thus the movement remained confined to the Congress. Mahatma described the campaign in glowing terms as the most glorious and disciplined campaigns ever launched by the Congress. Some scholars have described it in terms of perhaps the weakest and the least effective of the Gandhian campaigns. In more recent times however, scholars have drawn attention to the regional variations in this short-lived campaign. In the United Provinces, the Congress Committees were asked to convert themselves into Satyagraha Committees. Those who were not in agreement with the programme proposed by Gandhi were asked to resign from the organisation. Sucheta Kripalani was one of the first Congress members to be arrested from the region (Visalakshi Menon, 2003).

Regional studies have shown that the Individual *Satyagraha* campaign was fairly successful in the United Provinces. In western India prominent leaders like Vinoba Bhave were arrested in October 1940 and went to jail. By June 1941 about 20,000 Congressmen had been arrested in different parts of the country. However, it failed to impress the popular masses everywhere. Besides the restrictions placed on the campaign by Gandhi himself, the agitational potential present in the late 1930s in places like Bihar and United Provinces, had also either been suppressed or assuaged by the provincial Congress governments through some modest land reforms before their resignation. By October 1941, the campaign lost its initial impetus and only about 5,600 *Satyagrahis* had remained in jail. Thus, by and large the campaign was limited to symbolic acts of defiance. Individual Satyagraha did not completely jeopardise war effort. Nor did it bring the two sides – the imperial government and the Congress on to the negotiating table.

However, recent studies have shown that despite the limited impact of the Individual Satyagraha campaign, several relatively unknown and marginal individuals joined the campaign to also protest against local excesses. For instance, in 1940-41 tribal leaders like Laxman Naiko in the Malkangiri district in Orissa, along with seven local villagers launched individual *satyagraha*. It was through these *satyagrahas* that a movement was built against the immediate grievances of illegal exactions, forced and unpaid labour etc. Ultimately, the movement failed to jeopardise the war efforts of the state. As the Congress emphasised on discipline and discouraged militancy, the officials, who had expected acts of daring and aggression, dismissed the campaigns as 'stillborn'. In places like Burdwan in Bengal, the District Magistrate noted that even the Satyagrahis were becoming impatient with the restrictions on their activities and there was every possibility of their attempting a more active programme. In any case, it was difficult to retain sustained levels of patience and endurance once food scarcity, price-rise and state repression began raising their ugly heads and fundamental issues remained un-addressed. Political groups like the Forward Bloc, the

Congress Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Communist Party became more belligerent in their anti-war rhetoric and were more vociferous in their criticism of the war effort. Right-wing organisations flexed their muscles too. The Hindu Mahasabha and the semi-militarised Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) spread its net in different parts of the country.

20.6 CRIPPS MISSION

The political mood in India was certainly becoming belligerent in the backdrop of the individual acts of defiance against the war-effort as witnessed in the individual *satyagraha* campaigns and the increase in the lack of faith in the British Indian Army's capability of defending the east against the aggressive onward march of Japan. There was an attempt made by Sir Tejbahadur Sapru, a leading lawyer from Allahabad, to bring the Congress and the League together to resolve the existing impasse. When the attempt failed he presided over a conference called the Bombay Conference to arrive at a settlement with the government and to put across the Indian perspective. This conference was organised on 13-14 March 1941 in Bombay. It was largely attended by prominent non-Congress members many of whom had attended the Round Table Conference in London in 1931. The conference proposed that Britain should make a declaration promising India Dominion Status after the war. Secondly, in the interval, all central government portfolios should be transferred to the hands of non-official Indians. These proposals, thus, differed from the Congress proposals in that they did not demand immediate independence and they also proposed that the central executive in India should remain responsible to the Crown at least for the duration of the war. The proposals aroused considerable expectations. However, the talks with the government ultimately failed. The government refused to concede to any of the proposals. Amery, the Secretary of State scuttled the issue on Dominion Status after the war by playing the communal card. He observed that Jinnah had denounced the proposals as a trap by 'Congress wirepullers'.

In the meantime, government's policy of appeasing the minorities in Indian politics continued. It had almost acceded to the demand of the Muslim League for secession from the Indian state if the Congress was to acquire control at the Centre. At the same time, however, Britain could not risk inaction. The British War Cabinet announced certain measures for the conferment of Dominion Status on India. In the meeting of the War Cabinet it was declared that 'The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion, associated with the United Kingdom and the other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs" (Nicholas Mansergh, p. 342). The Cripps Mission was thus formulated under the stewardship of Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal in the Home Government, on 30 March 1942, as a preventive measure to thwart all attempts at withdrawal of support to Britain.

The Cripps Mission was fraught with ambiguities in terms of its purpose. Stafford Cripps, a Socialist in British politics, was ready to concede considerable ground to the demands of the Indian nationalists. For instance, in the press conference at Delhi on 28 March 1942, he went as far as to say that the Indian state had the right to secede from the Commonwealth at a future date. In his discussions with leader s like Rajagopalachari and Nehru, knowing that the basic objection of the

Congress was to the emphasis attached to the 'Dominion Status' for India in all negotiations to discuss the post-war political status of India rather than '*poorna Swaraj*' or complete independence as was the demand of the nationalists, he underplayed the use of the term. He explained that it had been used chiefly to silence possible objections in the House of Commons or from the dominions themselves. Cripps made it clear that it was a question of terminology not substance. However, Churchill was not so charitable or conceding. He continued to hold the view that the main problem preventing the future course of political affairs in India was not British imperialism but the aspirations of the Muslims, the Princes and the 'Hindu Untouchables'. The imperial strategy of denying India national independence by citing the presence of 'different sects or nations in India' was again at work here. Due to rigidity of this kind, Stafford Cripps could not manoeuvre much. Moreover there was nothing very reassuring about Britain's fate in the war. Singapore surrendered on 15 February and Rangoon fell to the Japanese on 8 March 1942 – a day prior to the announcement of Cripps Mission (9 March 1942). The bleakness of the possibility of Allied victory in World War II, prompted Gandhi to remark that the Cripps Mission was like a post-dated cheque upon a falling bank. The imagery drawn indicated that Britain had little to offer in the immediate situation.

The collapse of the Cripps negotiations did not disturb the equanimity of political circles in Britain. The rush to clinch the demand for a 'national government' in India following Japanese victories in Southeast Asia failed to come through. Many like Cripps and Clement Attlee, the leader of the British Labour Party and the Deputy Prime Minister in Winston Churchill Wartime Coalition Government, blamed Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to the Cripps Mission for the failure of negotiations. This was an unfair assessment of the situation. The War Cabinet in Britain and Linlithgow and the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army, Wavell, had in fact earlier expressed alarm at Cripps conceding too many concessions to the Congress (Sumit Sarkar, 1983; pp. 387-88) and thus been responsible for the ultimate failure of the Mission. Five months after the announcement of the Cripps Mission, on 8 August 1942, the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) passed the 'Quit India' resolution and thus triggered off a movement that surpassed almost all the earlier 'Gandhian' movements in terms of widespread and popular participation.

20.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have discussed the circumstances leading towards the Quit India Movement. The declaration of the Second World War prompted the British colonial rulers to make India a part of it. Indian armies were sent to fight the enemies of the British and Indian resources were used for this purpose. This was done without taking the nationalist leadership into confidence. The Congress ministries, which were formed in the provinces in the wake of 1937 elections, resigned in protest against such unilateral decision by the colonial government. Individual Satyagraha was started in various parts of the country against this decision. In order to placate the nationalists, the British government sent the Cripps Mission to negotiate dominion status for India, but its proposals were completely rejected by the Congress. This set the stage for confrontation between the nationalists and the colonial government resulting in the launch of the Quit India movement which we will discuss in the next Unit.

20.8 EXERCISES

1) Why did the Congress ministries in the provinces resign?

2) What steps did the British colonial government in India take to counter the nationalist demands?

3) Write a note on the individual satyagraha started by the Congress in this period.

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UNIT 21 QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT*

Structure

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21.1 INTRODUCTION

The Quit India Movement has rightly been described as the most massive anti-imperialist struggle on the eve of Partition and Independence. 1942, the year that the movement was launched and the next five years witnessed unparalleled and tumultuous events in the political history of India. Sharp increase in popular nationalism, large-scale deprivation and death due to widespread famine conditions particularly the Bengal Famine of 1943, heightened Japanese aggression in Burma and Malaya, hopes of a military deliverance through the onward march of the 'Azad Hind Fauj' of Subhas Chandra Bose, and widening of the communal divide leading to the vivisection of the political fabric of the country were some of these developments. In this Unit, you will learn about various aspects of the Quit India Movement launched by Gandhi and the Congress to achieve freedom for India.

21.2 NATURE OF THE MOVEMENT

This movement was projected initially as the mass civil disobedience movement of 1942. The emphasis on the 'mass' aspect distinguished it from the controlled and limited individual *satyagrahas* or civil disobedience of 1941. In nationalist historiography it has been described as the 'third great wave' of struggle against the British. The movement differed radically from other movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22 and the Civil-Disobedience Movement of 1930-34 were conceived as campaigns of peaceful resistance to British rule in India. Their social base had expanded gradually to accommodate wider popular participation. However, the 1942 movement from the very beginning was a massive uprising to compel the British to withdraw entirely from India. The emphasis in the struggle was not on traditional Satyagraha but on 'fight to the finish'. It therefore represented a challenge to the state machinery. Moreover, Gandhi was now also prepared for riots and violence. His preparedness was based on his reading of the mood of the public. Gandhi had tested the mood in the limited yet symbolic campaign of Individual Satyagraha in 1941 when about 23,000 *satyagrahis* had gone to jail. He now conceded that the masses could take up arms in self-defence. Armed resistance against a stronger

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and well-equipped aggressor was to be considered a non-violent act as he observed in his articles in the *Harijan* in March 1942. Accepting the role of individual freedom and civil liberties in the face of state's organised violence, he affirmed that "every individual was to consider himself free and act for himself".

The 1942 movement was less ambiguous in its declared objectives. It was launched to ensure the complete withdrawal of British power from India. The projected struggle had four main features: 1) It was accommodative of violence directed against the state; 2) It aimed at destroying British rule in India. Unlike earlier movements when Gandhi had asked trained *satyagrahis* to join the movements, anybody who believed in the complete independence of the country could join it now; 3) Students were urged to play a prominent part and to lead the movement should senior Congress leaders be arrested; and 4) The movement was to be marked by total defiance of government authority.

The difference from the earlier movements has been well-established in the rich scholarship on the movement. In the official and the non-official historiography, most of the debate centres around 'spontaneity' vs. 'organisation' argument or the degree of violence and non-violence in the 'Congress rebellion'. The government was keen to denounce Gandhi on charges of planning subversion and prepared a ground for the implementation of the Revolutionary Movement Ordinance. Intelligence reports warned of a series of acts planned by the Congress and the CSP to disrupt the smooth functioning of the war machinery. In fact, official sources had reported that the CSP workers had worked out modalities in a meeting in Allahabad in July 1941 for a radical course of action in Feb 1942. The plan of action came to be known as the Deoli Plan of Jai Prakash Narayan because the latter had reasoned from his Deoli Jail cell that nationalist unity could be revived if Gandhi were to plan a radical course of action rather than a Satyagraha. These papers were seized and used as evidence of the revolutionary plot planned by the CSP.

As these allegations grew a secret report of 24 July 1942 warned that 15 September 1942 was being planned by the Congress as the date when the 'ultimatum' to the imperial authorities to withdraw from the country was to expire, heralding the beginning of a campaign. The report disclosed, '…it is reliably understood that Congress contemplates in the coming movement that the maximum effort will be made by open and subversive groups alike to paralyse the existing form of Government. There are to be no restrictions on the actions of those who choose in their own way to assist the Congress to achieve their end… Congress is prepared to encourage all groups to assist them in whatever way they choose and with whatever weapon they choose'. Based on such accounts the imperialist historiography charged the Congress with conspiracy. The nationalist historians on the other hand interpreted these accounts to highlight a degree of central direction and organisation in the rebellion and to depict the ascendancy of the Congress. Once the movement was formally launched on 8 August 1942 and the main leaders arrested, the focus shifted to its elemental and radical aspects. In official discourse the movement came to be conceived as the most 'un-Gandhian' of all nationalist struggles. The same aspect has been discussed by scholars such as Francis Hutchins in terms of the 'spontaneity' of the 'unfinished revolution'. It has also been described in terms of the 'greatest outburst ever' in the history of the national movement in India and yet, a 'patchy occurrence'.

Scholars have also focussed attention on the 1942 movement in order to either question or to establish the Congress ascendancy or leadership in different parts of the country. The nationalist writers have demonstrated that the nation stood united behind its leaders in 1942. And, since Gandhi had sanctioned violence in this movement most of what happened was as he had wished. In more recent times, scholars have explored the movement as it developed at the grass-roots. Paul Greenough in his work on the underground literature of the movement in Medinipur, Bengal, had observed that it was the move away from the issues, themes and symbols which Gandhi had articulated that provided Quit India Movement with a distinctive character and lent internal tension to it. However, Gyanendra Pandey has argued that popular anger and action cannot merely be interpreted as deviation from Gandhian norms. Rather, activities in the wake of the movement may be interpreted in terms of the appropriation of the name and symbols of Gandhian nationalism for a politics that was essentially their own (Gyanendra Pandey, p. 125). In recent times numerous other accounts have also added to our understanding of the nature of the movement as it spread in different parts of the country.

21.3 WAR AND RUMOURS

The intensity of the movement was primarily due to conditions related to World War II (1939-45). A variety of factors such as the immediacy of the war in different parts of the subcontinent, the rapid increase in inflationary conditions, Government's preparedness to put down any resistance that might interfere with War supplies and the sharp difference of opinion among nationalist leaders and parties about the stand to be adopted in the face of the national and international crisis, affected the participation of people in the movement of 1942.

World War II and the possibility of its impact on developments in India had caught the attention of the political leadership in India and in England. Military and strategic considerations were cited to withhold political concessions to Indians. As the war progressed and as the forces of nationalism challenged the colonial systems in Asia, the Raj hardened its position further. It was relatively easy to influence opinions in Britain at this time. Evidently, India was the backbone of British defence east of Suez. Now the focus was on defending the Empire. Thus the political opinions that favoured granting Dominion status to India were overruled and the rigid and uncompromising position of Winston Churchill carried the day.

In 1939-40, the imperial state trumpeted the need for stepping up the war effort. At the same time, the military defeats faced by the Allied powers in the hands of the Japanese army indicated that countries like Burma and India would be left in the lurch on the face of successful attack from Japan. This feeling grew stronger as the Japanese forces occupied Burma and raided Akyab, the region bordering Chittagong in east Bengal, twenty-five times! Refugees poured in narrating woes of war, destruction and abandonment. The retreat of the British Indian Army from Burma was tame indeed. The British Navy did not seem strong enough to counter the Japanese in the Indian Ocean. Japanese air and naval superiority over the Bay of Bengal during 1942 made the East Coast ports of Calcutta, Chittagong, Madras and Vizag largely unusable. Thus, India faced an imminent threat on her eastern land frontier and on the almost undefended eastern seaboard at a time when the Germans were advancing in the West. That the triumph of the

Japanese in South and Southeast Asia had unnerved the British military establishment is evident in the plan for the defence of north-east India, drawn up on 12 February 1942. In this the Gen. Staff had worked out a 'demolition policy' to deny the Japanese forces access to essentials. The policy involved destruction of power stations, oil installations and wireless, cable and telegraph stations. The military authorities also planned to destroy the ports of Calcutta and Chittagong and carry out the sinking of river craft and removal of railway stock as part of the demolition policy. The Denial Policy in Bengal, that involved removal of rice and other essential items and boats and bicycles from the inland areas in order to prevent Japanese intrusion, was the consequence such fears.

The ill thought-out Air-raid Precautionary Schemes undertaken in areas that faced a direct military threat, the inflationary spiral and the growing shortage of food resources, exposed the hollowness of the claim of the British military preparedness. The economic situation in the interiors of the country, particularly eastern India had affected millions of people. Although scholars have pointed out that there need not always be a cause and effect relationship between economic crisis and political upheavals, yet the deteriorating economic conditions, for instance in Bengal, did affect the growing uneasiness among the people, particularly in the rural areas. It was evident that the authorities were doing very little to address their economic grievances. This was true of the jute growing areas of east Bengal. From 1940 onwards war-related developments had a scissors effect on the price of jute which crashed and the grain prices which increased.

The district officials neglected the signs of distress and permitted the export of rice from these areas. In addition, the rice and the boat denial policy resulted in the removal of nearly forty thousand tons of rice from the interiors of rural Bengal and affected the movement of large sections of population in the rice growing areas of Bengal and further reduced the supply of foodstuffs. This gave rise to an atmosphere of great insecurity and prompted speculation and large-scale hoarding of essential goods. Items such as matches, salt, kerosene, mustard oil, sugar and finally, rice disappeared from the village markets. There was a synchronisation of rising prices and shortages with the coming of a large number of Allied troops. Thus the fears that the food reserves of the country were being depleted to feed the army were not unfounded. At the same time in mid-1942 the British had little confidence in their capacity to defend Bengal and Assam in the event of a Japanese invasion. The educated sections feared the implementation of some kind of a 'scorched earth' policy in Eastern India. Grievances springing from an acute economic crisis and the lack of any political or administrative mediation to conciliate the affected population while enforcing military imperatives such as the denial policy provided a renewed lease of life to anti-state activities.

As in the earlier phases of the national movement, rumours played a significant role in formulation of opinion regarding the onward march of the war, the British imperial policy and the fate of the British in the war. These rumours acted as a form of resistance as well as expressing a form of subaltern knowledge and understanding of the political struggle in which people found themselves. A few examples will establish the point. As the war progressed, there were rumours in the tribal areas of Central Provinces in May 1941 that the blood of the Gonds was being used to restore the limbs of the injured British soldiers (Crispin Bates, 2007, p. 158)! In Jabalpur in the same province, a rumour circulated that owing to food shortages the government was about to order a general evacuation of the

city. David Hardiman's work on Gujarat has highlighted the chaos in different parts of the region following the increase in Japanese aggression in East Asia. In Dec 1941 there was a rush on banks as also a renewed hoarding of precious metals on the spread of rumours. In early 1942 many Gujarati families of Bombay fearing bombing and subsequent chaos left the city for their ancestral homes in Gujarat. These evacuees further disseminated the stories and rumours current in Bombay. Merchants and businessmen of Gujarat were apprehensive about a scorched earth policy and its devastating impact as witnessed in Rangoon when the city was evacuated. Their fears were reinforced by reports of how the British had favoured whites over coloured people during evacuation. Thus people were warned not to depend on the British in such times of crisis. By May it was feared that the Japanese fleet would soon attack the west coast of India. This encouraged widespread hoarding of food and a sharp rise in food prices throughout Gujarat and Saurashtra. One month before the beginning of the Quit India Movement, in July 1942, the authorities in Gujarat reported a feeling of great insecurity in the villages and a big demand for weapons for self-protection.

Rumours played an important role in the dissemination of information of a certain kind in militarily vulnerable regions such as Bengal, particularly with the increase in Japanese aggression in December 1941. Rumours were afloat regarding the impending British defeat. Peasants were advised to withhold food from the forces, seamen to decline work except in coastal waters and dock workers were asked not to handle war material. The fortunes of seamen, port and dock workers were directly linked to the ups and downs of the war. Their pliability was strategically significant for the war. The state hoped for their passivity as their militancy would have spurred anti-state activities.

21.4 PREPARATIONS FOR STRUGGLE

The political mainstream had responded to the war-related developments in Asia and Europe differently. While the Congress Working Committee banned participation in the war effort, it shared and supported Britain's anti-Fascist position in international politics. Thus, Britain and the Congress were on the same side as far as their anti-Fascist stance is concerned. But there were acute differences of opinion within the Congress on international developments. Subhas Chandra Bose, re-elected to the post of the President of the Congress in 1938 proposed that Britain should be confronted with the ultimatum that she should free India or face direct action and disorder. Gandhi was opposed to this. With his intervention, Bose was forced out of office in May 1939. The differences between the two leaders explain, to some extent, Gandhi's attitude towards the British in the early stages of World War II. His views were also at variance with those of Jawaharlal Nehru who favoured an immediate declaration of independence as a precondition for the Congress lending support to the war. Ultimately, the Congress Working Committee Resolution of September 1939, declared that Britain should state clearly her war aims and recognise that freedom was her goal not only in relation to the occupied and un-free European nations but in relation to India too. It must be mentioned that in the early stages of the war there were hardly any political concessions made to enlist Indian cooperation.

The international political situation altered considerably from the summer of 1940. The Axis powers grew aggressive in Britain and Europe. As India's role in imperial defence grew in importance on account of her resources, manpower

and economic potential in the region east of Suez, Britain equipped herself with both, a Revolutionary Movement's Ordinance to crush civil resistance and a plan to pacify the Congress with the promise of grant of political concessions. However, the offer known as Viceroy Linlithgow's 'August offer' of 1940 fell short of expectations. In the meantime, Gandhi who had insisted on non-violence in the international arena, launched an 'individual satyagraha' in 1940 against British Indian Government's war-efforts and against the prohibition to protest against it.

From the winter of 1941 and following the failure of the Cripps' Mission in March 1942, there were growing differences within the Congress largely due to war-related circumstances. After the collapse of Cripps' negotiations, the British Cabinet, including its Labour members, did nothing to demand a 'national government' in India during the course of the war. Administrative highhandedness in India, as witnessed in the continuance of Governor's authoritarian rule in the provinces, was accepted almost unquestioningly. Moreover, the British Cabinet gave Linlithgow and the government of India full support in their repression of the Quit India Movement. Their authoritarian attitude towards the Congress can be explained through their anger that Congress had sought to destroy British position in India at the time when it faced a major crisis in the war with Japan.

21.5 POLITICAL SITUATION IN INDIA IN 1942

There were many contradictory stances and many conflicting tones in the statements and messages put out by many Congress leaders at different times and in different parts of the country a little before the beginning of the Quit India Movement. Gandhi's own language was distinctly more militant in the wake of 'the Cripps fiasco'. In May 1942 he wrote: "I waited and waited until the country should develop the non-violent strength necessary to throw off the foreign yoke. But my attitude has undergone a change. I feel that I cannot afford to wait… That is why I have decided that even at certain risks, which are evidently involved, I must ask the people to resist the slavery" (D.G. Tenulkar, 1956, p. 124, p. 135).

By early August 1942, considerable preparations had been made to launch the movement. As soon as Gandhi's plan was known Viceroy Linlithgow geared himself up to nip it in the bud. London suggested opening of negotiations with Gandhi when Stafford Cripps had left. However, Gandhi was not open for negotiations at this stage. Popular unrest, the deterioration in the war situation and the refusal of the British to allow any involvement of the Congress in government during wartime compelled Gandhi to decide upon a more militant line. Various pronouncements were made to this effect from the summer of 1942. The first draft of such a course of action was rejected in a meeting of the AICC on 27 April. In May, Gandhi gave a speech asking Britain to "leave India to God. If that is too much, then leave her to anarchy". On 14 July, AICC adopted a resolution proposing a programme of civil disobedience if the British did not concede to their demands. Within a month of this ultimatum the All India Congress Committee session commenced on 7 August 1942 in a grand pandal of 35,000 sq. feet at Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay. Apprehensions due to the uncertainties of the war compelled Gandhi to begin his speech, delivered in Hindi, by saying that he did not believe that the British would be defeated, but if they were defeated they would follow a scorched earth policy as they did in Burma and Malaya. In that event Japan would have attacked India. Hence the urgency

of the British quitting India". On 8 August 1942 the Quit India Resolution, modified by Nehru, was finally adopted. This is what Gandhi had to say towards the end of his speech:

'Here is a mantra, short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman or (Congress) woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery. Let that be your pledge … Take a pledge with God and your own conscience as witness, that you will no longer rest till freedom is achieved and will be prepared to lay down your lives in the attempt to achieve it. He who loses his life will gain it; he who will seek to save it shall lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted'. (Speech at Bombay, 8 Aug, 1942, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, 2008, p.486)

The Government of India was determined to neutralise the Congress leadership. Its determination was sharpened by the danger from the Japanese in Asia. It was militarily prepared to crush any civil disobedience movement. Thus, within hours of the launch of the 'Quit India' movement on 8 August 1942 at the All India Congress Committee session in Bombay by Mahatma Gandhi, the entire CWC leadership was arrested and taken to different prisons. The next day, Gandhi, Nehru and many other leaders of the Indian National Congress were arrested by the British Indian Government. This heralded the spread of the movement in different parts of the country.

In the early hours of 9 August Gandhi was arrested along with other leaders and was rendered temporarily incommunicado. On 9 August Congressmen still at large were Maulana Azad, Sadiq Ali, Dhayabhai Patel, Pyarelal Nair, Ram Mahohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Sucheta Kripalani. These individuals in Bombay then drew up a programme of action – the Twelve-point programme. The original programme is said to have been prepared by the Congress leaders under Gandhi's instructions or with his consent before 9 August. It began with a call for day-long *hartal* and incorporated all the methods of non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience which had been employed under Gandhi's leadership since 1920. The final stage of the movement included actions such as the breaking of salt laws on a large scale, picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops, promoting industrial strikes, holding up of railways and telegraph, calling to soldiers of the British Indian Army to come out and join the people, non-payment of taxes and the setting up of parallel Government. (Hiteshranjan Sanyal, pp. 20-21) This was copied and circulated among people between 9 and 11 August soon after the arrest of the Congress leaders. As is evident from the kind of activities mentioned, the Twelve Point Programme was very broad in nature. It addressed the concerns of diverse sections of people. As a result several versions of this programme prepared by the CSP and lesser known outfits like the Khadi group appeared to have gained wide currency. The course of action laid stress upon militant activities. This explains the uniformity in the course of the uprising in different parts of the country despite the absence from the scene of the important Congress leaders.

A comprehensive British Intelligence report on the Quit India Movement prepared by T. Wickenden had indicated that the Congress leaders had decided to work

out the details of the programme after the AICC meeting in Bombay which ended on 8 August 1942. However, the arrest of the majority of the Congress leaders between 9 and 11 August deprived the Congress of the opportunity to conduct the movement. Consequently, the initiative passed into the hands of the lower-rank of political workers, students and the common people. These groups undertook a confrontationist attitude and advocated direct and drastic mass actions. A central directorate for continuing the movement was set up after 9 August, but it took considerable time for it to establish links with the autonomous developments in different parts of the country.

Officials like Sir Reginald Maxwell (Home Member, Government of India) and Sir Richard Tottenham (Additional Secretary, Home Department) played an active role in establishing that the Congress and its leaders had organised the Quit India Movement in order to jeopardise the war efforts of the imperial government. The authorities issued a secret circular dated 17 July 1942, signed by Sir Frederick Puckle, secretary to the Government of India, which read as – "…The threat of Civil Disobedience is a direct invitation to the Japanese … If Congress cannot get their own way… (they) will throw India to the Japanese and Germans… The object is to mobilise public opinion against the Congress. ..The National War Front should be used to the fullest to oppose proposals which can only be detrimental to the war effort. Speeches, letters to the local Press, leaflets, cartoons, posters, whispering campaigns are possible media for local publicity". (K.K. Chaudhari, 1988, p.102) Imperial officials were therefore determined to demonstrate that any defiance of British policy in India during the war amounted to hostility towards the Allied Powers, mainly Britain. Since the USA was critical of Britain's imperial interests in India and elsewhere it was useful to argue that the Congress was encouraging fascist forces and therefore it was justified to deal with the national movement with an iron hand. The panic-stricken government even contemplated deporting Gandhi to Aden or Nyasaland and the other main Congress leaders to Uganda or elsewhere in East Africa!

The controversial Revolutionary Movements' Ordinance, which was intended to wipe out the Quit India Movement, was signed by the Viceroy on 12 August 1942. It was withheld from being issued in the Gazette of India because most of the provinces argued they could make do with powers under the Defence of India Rules (DIR). Martial Law was not declared because civilian officials were already equipped with plenipotentiary powers to suppress the uprising. During the war, DIR permitted the Government to take any arbitrary action against persons and property in the name of war effort. Thus officials could now undertake punitive actions not covered by law. Indian Penal Code was to be used as a shield against any demand for enquiry into police excesses.

The government also brought into force the Special Criminal Courts Ordinance II of 1942 which was originally intended to apply to cases arising directly from 'enemy' (Axis) attack. The Ordinance was made applicable to cases arising from the disturbances from 26 October 1942. This empowered the government to short-circuit the process of criminal justice. Under this ordinance special criminal courts could be set up which would have summary jurisdiction over the suspected offenders. They could be imprisoned for a maximum duration of two years and there was very limited scope for appeal to the higher courts. The judiciary however continued to be reluctant to ratify actions by the Government. Even the *London Tribune* condemned atrocities by the British in Bombay – "Our armoured cars

are going into action against Congress supporters in Bombay. Our political warfare has reached new inspiring heights. We proclaim a Whipping Act for the people of India. Every step taken by the Government of India since the dawn of the 9th August has been a stab in the back of the men and women who work and fight and die in the cause of freedom… The suicidal policy of the Government of India must be reversed" (*London Tribune*, 14 August 1942, Chaudhari, pp. 118-119). As government repression increased, so did the saga of nationalist upsurge in various parts of the country, most significantly certain pockets in Gujarat, Satara in Mahrashtra, Ballia in United Provinces, Medinipur in Bengal, and many areas in Bihar. Press censorship encouraged underground literature like the *Bombay Congress Bulletin* that was printed on 10 August in English, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi and Urdu; *Vande Mataram* in Gujarati; *Ittehad* in Urdu in Bombay; *Biplabi* in Bengali in Medinipur.

21.6 REGIONAL ASPECTS OF THE MOVEMENT

The Quit India Movement had two phases: an initial mass movement phase from August until September, followed by a longer quasi-guerrilla insurgency phase. In the cities, strike action continued from 9-14 August in Bombay and in Calcutta from 10-17 August. There were strikes in Kanpur, Lucknow and Nagpur and violent clashes with striking millworkers in Delhi. In Patna, the police almost completely lost control over the city for two days after clashes in front of the Secretariat on 11 August. Thereafter those activists who had not been arrested, including militant groups of students spread out from the cities to join the insurrection in rural areas. Mass participation was inspired by inflammatory underground publications, such as the *Bombay Provincial Bulletin*, *Free India*, *War of India Bulletin*, *Do or Die News-sheet*, *Free State of India Gazette* and the *Congress Gazette* which flourished after the official Congress leadership had been imprisoned and their offices, assets and printing presses seized.

In most places the movement declined within two to four weeks from 9 August 1942. This was due to both government repression through the army and the police and because the leaders responsible for guiding the movement failed to consolidate the spirit of rebellion among the people. But the quick spread and the intensity of the movement took the British Indian government by surprise. The intelligence machinery of the government had failed to warn the authorities about the likely extent of the movement. Thus during the first two weeks of the uprising the authority of the government practically collapsed over vast tracts in the United Provinces, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Central Provinces, Maharashtra and in some parts of the Madras Presidency.

In Western India the movement was slow to grow in August 1942. But as it gained momentum it continued into 1943 and in some cases even longer. In districts such as East Khandesh, Satara, Broach and Surat large number of peasants took part in guerrilla-style attacks on government property, lines of communication, and people known to be sympathetic to British rule. The agitation was remarkable also due to the strength and duration of protest in towns such as Pune, Ahmadnagar and Ahmedabad. One commentator named Ahmedabad as 'the Stalingrad of India'! Western India also took a lead in bomb and sabotage activities. Of the 664 bomb explosions recorded in India from August 1942 to January 1944, nearly 76 per cent occurred in Bombay Presidency.

The strong bases of the Congress were Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat cities, the districts of Kheda and Surat and the Jambusar taluka of Broach district. One important group from the viewpoint of the movement was the *Gujarat Vyayam Prachark Mandal* (Gujarat Society For the Propagation of Physical Training). Its leader, Chhotubhai Purani was associated with extremist nationalist organisations. He had later become an active member of the Gandhian Congress but had never fully accepted the principle of non-violence. He founded a network of gymnasiums throughout Gujarat in which boys and young men were taught that they should train both their bodies and minds to fight the British. The boys were mostly Brahmans, Baniyas, Patidars from urban middle-class and prosperous rural families. Gandhi approved of these activities in part because Purani had refused to allow right-wing Hindu and anti-Muslim sentiments to be voiced in his gymnasiums. By 1942 there were as a result a large number of young men in Gujarat who were mentally and physically prepared to support a violent struggle against the British. It was in this explosive atmosphere that the Congress leaders launched the Quit India Movement in which the likes of Vallabhbhai supported the agitationist mood of the people whereas Morarji Desai took a more cautious approach since he believed that Gandhi's work for non-violence would be undone if popular violence was condoned and encouraged.

There were similar stories in almost all the major cities across the country. As soon as the news of the arrest of Gandhi broke, the millworkers downed their tools, the merchants closed their shops, students left their schools and colleges, and large crowds flocked the streets. In Ahmedabad, the crowds targeted policemen and anyone wearing the symbol of colonial culture like the solar topi. On 10 August about 2,000 students took out a procession. When the police tried to break it up with lathi-charges, the students counter-attacked, throwing bricks. Demonstrations and clashes with the police continued at a high pitch for another two weeks.

In Kheda, a total of ten agitators were killed by the police between 11 and 19 August. In addition to the open clashes, there was widespread cutting of telegraph wire and other minor acts of sabotage on public property. According to Sir Roger Lumley (Governor of Bombay from 1937-43), Kheda was the most disturbed district in the Bombay Presidency during August. In Baroda State, by 17 August the moderate Praja Mandal leaders were forced by popular pressure to declare their support for the Quit India Movement. On 18 August when the organisation was banned and the leaders were arrested there were turbulent demonstrations. The underground movement remained strong. Most effective were the big mass protests. Notably absent from these protests were the Muslims, who made up twenty per cent of the population of Ahmedabad and fifteen per cent of the population of Baroda. There had been a definite change in the political loyalties of substantial sections of Muslims since the founding of the branches of Muslim League here since 1937.

Relationship between the working classes and middle class nationalist remained cordial. In 1942 there were 75 textile mills in Ahmedabad with 116,000 workers. Work in the mills was divided on communal lines – majority of the spinners were *harijans*, weavers were mostly patidar immigrants from north Gujarat and Muslims. Most powerful of labour unions were with Majur Mahajan Sangh which was closely connected with the Congress for over two decades. In 1942, it organised protests and strikes for the political cause and not for higher wages.

Workers were persuaded to return to their home towns in times of inflation. The mill-owners were frightened that if the Japanese advanced into India, the British might destroy their textile mills as they retreated. As there was not much to gain from cooperation with the British war effort they had sympathy with the Congress suggestion that the Indian people should negotiate with the Japanese. They realised that if the Congress would form government after war it was in their interest not to alienate the party at this critical juncture. They also feared sabotage if they kept the mills open. But they did not support the Quit India Movement openly.

Protest in rural areas was the strongest in Kheda district. The most noticeable difference between rural agitation in 1942 and earlier Congress agitation in Gujarat was that this time revenue refusal was on the nationalist agenda from the beginning. Revenue collection was resumed in December 1942 only when the movement had begun to slacken. Collective fines were levied on villages which had provided violent support to the struggle. In 1932-34, the land of all the peasants who had participated in the civil-disobedience campaign was confiscated and returned only in 1938. They did not want a repeat of the ordeal. The draconian measures adopted by the authorities with show of troop strength also had a dampening impact in the rural areas. Moreover, the rich peasants had made profits due to war-time inflation and were therefore not too eager to lend support to the movement. The lower caste peasants - the Baraiyas, Patanvadiys and Thakardas – by and large remained aloof from the movement. Their belief that the Congress was primarily a Patidar party was confirmed when in 1938 the Congress government in Bombay forced them to return the land that had earlier been confiscated due to revenue refusal during the civil disobedience movement and which they had bought at low prices.

The movement in Gujarat was not socially very radical. A very successful parallel government was nevertheless established in Ahmedabad. It duplicated the existing administrative machinery with underground leaders in charge of each municipal ward. This was the 'Azad Government'. It organised protests, levied taxes, issued information in 'patrikas', collected intelligence through a network of spies and punished certain notorious policemen. The leadership was in the hands of young Congress socialists. The parallel government drew its legitimacy from the broad mass of the Hindu middle classes of the city. No attempt was made to establish such bodies in the rural areas. Thus when rural underground activists were hounded down by the police in early 1943, the peasantry had no alternative programme to turn to. According to David Hardiman, only in the adivasi areas of south Gujarat were there indications of a more radical movement, for there the struggle was directed chiefly against Baniya moneylenders and Parsi landlords-cum-liquor dealers. Local high caste Gandhian leaders proved very sensitive to the implications of such activities, and did their best to discourage them. The Quit India Movement strengthened the hold of the Gandhian Congress over Gujarat. In 1944 Congress swept the polls in the Gujarat local elections of that year with huge majorities.

In Bihar and eastern UP as elsewhere, the cities were the first to experience action in the course of 1942 disturbances. There was, as Max Harcourt observes, intense rioting in the cities between 8-10 August. Then the focus shifted to the rural areas. Large crowds of armed villagers converged on the semi-isolated administrative centres in the localities and targeted the police posts and the local courts at the district and *tehsil* level. There were instances of looting of shops,

godowns and residences as well. Bihar, like Bengal and Orissa, was under Permanent Settlement. Some like the Darbhanga, Bettiah or Darbhanga Rajahs were very big landlords. However, the majority were medium level landholders. Rich peasants dominated over the rest of the village population. In eastern UP villages were under the domination of Bhumihar-Brahman or Rajput-Brahman peasants who had a leading role in the 1942 movement. With the growing problem of food shortages and the tales of horror recounted by the refugees returning from different parts of South East Asia, there was an increase in the activities organised by the Kisan Sabha which supported the Quit India campaign.

The underground movement grew very strong in Bihar and proved to be a major law and order problem for the British during 1942-44. Despite severe repression several terrorist organisations and dacoit gangs were formed in different parts of Bihar by 1943. Many of these groups had links with the Congress Socialist Party. They allied with socialist groups called 'Azad Dastas' and carried out activities in the name of the Congress. Vinita Damodaran equates these dacoit groups with Eric Hobsbawm's 'social bandits' and observes that they roamed the countryside with the support of the village population and filled the political vacuum between 1942-44. Their activities increased as Gandhi undertook a 21-day fast in prison in February 1943. In places like Muzaffarpur, Monghyr, Saran and Patna prisoners escaped from the overflowing prisons. There was a spurt in the publication of underground literature.

There was an increase in dacoities committed mainly for food. In Bhagalpur district the monthly incidence for dacoit crime in June 1943 was 310 as against a previous monthly average of 50. The targets were commonly food stores but attempts were also made to loot post offices, post bags, government treasuries and ammunition depots. These acts were often accompanied by cries of 'Gandhiji ki jai'. In Darbhanga, attacks on the local zamindar's *kutcheri* (office) was organised by Suraj Narayan Singh, a leader of the Congress Socialist Party who had received training in armed activity in Nepal. He was in constant contact with CSP leaders in Bombay. In Bhagalpur, dacoit gangs led by Sitaram Singh found wide support in the hands of villagers who provided food and money. Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the founder members of CSP, escaped from the prison in Nepal in November in 1942, and with the assistance of another socialist leader, Rammanohar Lohia, formed a parallel government on the Nepal border which lasted till 1944. In the neighbouring regions of Eastern UP, mainly the Ballia district, police stations were captured and a 'national government' was declared under the leadership of Chittu Pandey. In Azamgarh, the British could restore control only after massive use of troops and armed police (Crispin Bates 2010, p.162). In the Ghazipur dist of U.P. many recalled that the leadership was Gandhi's but the spirit was that of Bhagat Singh. (Gyan Pandey, 1996, p. 12).

The Quit India Movement in Medinipur in Bengal and the famine of 1943 are the two most significant markers of the turbulence that gripped Bengal during 1940-44. Highhandedness by the state in the wake of World War II, administrative apathy and widespread hunger and destitution provided the context for heightened public anger and protests. District officials had earlier voiced their concern that a protest movement would gather momentum if the grievances were not promptly and effectively removed. The provincial coalition government of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and the Muslim League under the leadership of the premier Fazlul Huq implemented the Defence of India Rule and announced that, "There

is no doubt that a mass movement capable of arousing the passions of hundreds and thousands of people during a period of war, may lead to serious consequences affecting the welfare of all sections of Indians. Such a movement cannot be allowed to spread anywhere in India to-day and not certainly in Bengal which falls within the danger zone".

Following Gandhi's arrest, the students of Calcutta like their counterparts in Bombay and Bihar vented their anger on services crucial to the war efforts. Interestingly, while the Calcutta Tramways, declared an essential service for the war period, was damaged, buses were ignored! Telegraph wires, railway lines and post offices were damaged. Masks covering the street lights as a precaution against air-raids were removed. Total collapse was prevented in the cities as the administration exploited the differences between the 'pro-war' (largely the Communists and members of the Radical Democratic Party) and 'anti-war' groups. The Priority Classes Scheme which provided for the industrial working-class of the cities also contributed to the relative lack of continued participation in the movement by industrial labour.

In east Bengal, the movement was restricted to towns and cities. Nationalist propaganda was intense here. Warnings against train journey is provided in leaflets like '*Rail Bhraman Bipadjanak*' (Train Journey's are dangerous') affected the normal functioning of such indispensable means of communication. Other leaflets like 'Why Are We Neutral in the War?' explained the position of the Congress in the war. The underground press remained very active in the Dacca Division even when the movement did not. In Mymensingh leaflets propagated that the Indian soldiers headed by Rashbehari Bose had occupied Imphal and that Subhas Bose was in Burma awaiting the moment to invade Bengal with an army of 10,000. The information was provided in anticipation because it was only in 1944 that this happened and the Indian National Army (INA) succeeded on the Manipur front. Leaflets of this kind perhaps appeared when the regular Bengali newspapers ceased to be published. *A War of Independence Bulletin* published by the Assam office of Japanese-German-Indian Association advised people to withdraw from Calcutta as Bengal and Assam were to witness the first drive of the Azad Hind Fauj.

The Congress had a strong presence in Medinipur in west Bengal since the days of the Non-Cooperation Movement. It had faced additional problems in the wake of the war due to the Denial Policy and rice exports to the industrial metropolises. War-related tensions and the political receptiveness of the area had a role to play in the flaring up of an 'open rebellion' here. Hiteshranjan Sanyal's study shows how a number of established Congress leaders had initially held aloof from the Quit India Movement. Thus the initiative passed to militant young students many of whom were without distinct party affiliations but had turned towards the Forward Bloc in the late 1930s. Amidst the rising tensions in 1942, the most significant development in Medinipur was the formation of a parallel government with the formidable name '*Mahabharata Yuktarashtra: Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar*'. The government remained functional till 1944. The repression that followed took the life of Matangini Hazra, an eighty-year old political worker who was killed in a lathi-charge on September 29, 1942. *Biplabi*, the underground newsletter of the Jatiya Sarkar reported on atrocities on women by the military and the police mainly to stifle protest. Women were asked to take-up arms in self-defence since Mahatma Gandhi had advised the same.

However, government repression remained unabated even when the region experienced nature's fury in the form of a cyclonic storm in October 1942 and as the famine progressed in 1943.

In Satara, in western Maharashtra, the Satyashodhak Samaj founded by the reformer Jyotiba Phule in the late nineteenth century provided the base and the main striking force to the Quit India movement. Here the peasantry had joined the nationalist movement in the 1930s with hardly any link with the Congress or the Left. Still Gandhi, in the opinion of Gail Omvedt, was an important symbol for all. Thus the main slogan of the 1942 movement – 'do or die' – produced the 'Prati sarkar' which she describes as the most powerful and long-lasting of the parallel governments established during the Quit India Movement.

The activities of the 'Prati Sarkar' included people's courts or *nyayadan mandals* as well as various types of armed activities and constructive programmes. Its last armed encounter with the police which resulted in two deaths took place after the naval mutiny in 1946. In caste terms Satara was dominated by Kunbis. Other sections of the population included the Dhangara artisan castes and the Mahars, Mangs and Ramoshis classed as a criminal tribe by the British. All these groups represented the 'bahujan samaj' or the majority and included a wide range of people across castes and classes. The first wave of activities in 1942 in Satara included sabotage, jailbreak and armed encounters with the police. People came with spears, axes and other home-made weapons and believed that they could put an end to colonial power. The govt imposed heavy fines and arrested people. 2000 people were in jail in Satara by the end of 1942.

The activists of the Prati Sarkar that was formed in early 1943, carried out both constructive as well as military and administrative tasks. They were organised into groups that were in touch with socialist groups of Bombay and established structures that included volunteer squads organised as Rashtra Seva Dal, Tufan Dal etc. The underground activists consisted of the young and educated sections of diverse castes of the 'bahujan Samaj'. Brahmans and merchants, Maratha middle-caste peasants and workers were very well-represented here. Dalits and women were under-represented. Between June 1943 and early 1944 as the movement spread here, attempts were made to build a viable and credible power structure by suppressing criminal activities including dacoity. In the middle of 1944 Gandhi gave a call to surrender since after his release from jail in May 1944, he was disturbed by the more violent underground activities. On 1 August he gave an open call for all those still underground to cease struggle and surrender. All over the country the nationalists, ranging from the disappointed socialist leadership to the loyal Congressmen, followed Gandhi's advice except in Satara.

21.7 SUMMARY

There were certain strands common to the 1942 movement in different parts of the country. One such was the appropriation of nationalist symbols by popular classes. Wider participation of large sections of people in mainstream movements had forced the pace of these movements. This was evident earlier during the peasant movements in northern Allahabad and Awadh, among the plantation workers in Assam and during the Gudem-Rampa rising led by Alluri Sitarama Raju in Andhra in the early 1920s. However, the enthusiasm of the general public was greater in 1942. Their sentiments were represented by socialist leaders like

Jayaprakash Narayan when the bulk of the peasantry of the Prati Sarkar refused to surrender as late as August 1944 even after Mahatma Gandhi expressed his desire that those who were still underground should surrender. There were different centres of political initiative due to the preceding three decades of militant nationalist activity. There was definitely a concern over outbreak of violence. But it was attributed to the provocative action of the Government and brutal repression.

In recent times it has been argued that the history of the Quit India Movement has been neglected primarily because none of the major political parties played a central role in it. It was mainly a movement of the subaltern classes. Had the political elite been in the forefront, the campaign would have been more conservative in form. Numerous accounts have established that in the absence of conventional leadership, marginal groups proved their mettle. The national movement gained from the convergence of local and national interests. However, the socially transformative character of the movement remained incomplete.

The Quit India Movement failed to end British rule in India. Yet, this was one movement that demonstrated the will and reserve of diverse communities of Indians to withstand both the highhandedness of imperial authorities and the elitism of the Indian political class. The Quit India Movement stands apart from the earlier movements in terms of the spirit and enthusiasm that it infused in ordinary people to support indigenous institutions and structures of power. The parallel governments that such efforts produced indicate the basic difference between the 1942 movement and the earlier movements. The Non-Cooperation Movement was urban based and was supported mostly by rich peasant groups like those in Gujarat. Compared with it the Civil Disobedience campaign was more widespread. It involved many more poor peasants and was radicalised by the impact of the depression. But the Quit India Movement, as the preceding discussion demonstrates, was the most radical and violent of them all. It was supported by the poor and labouring classes, who were the hardest hit by war time inflation and food shortages. Although every major city saw action in 1942, yet in most urban areas British control was too tight for Congress activism to last very long. By 1945 the Congress was moving in the direction of focusing its attention and energies on the 1946 elections.

21.8 EXERCISES

1) What were the immediate factors which prompted the launch of the Quit India Movement?

2) Discuss the basic aims of the Quit India Movement.

3) Describe the regional spread of the Quit India Movement.

UNIT 22 POST-WAR NATIONAL UPSURGES, 1945-47*

Structure

22.1 Introduction

22.2 End of World War II

22.3 Elections in Britain and in India

22.4 Popular Upsurges

22.5 Struggles of Workers, Peasants and People of Princely States

22.6 Summary

22.7 Exercises

22.1 INTRODUCTION

The end of the Second World War brought about a sea change in the political atmosphere in India, as in other parts of the world. Of course India did not fully share in the euphoria over the defeat of the Nazi forces, as she never got the assurances she asked for to enable her active cooperation in Allied defence. However, the end of hostilities meant the end of a terrible period of food scarcity, brought about by drought and worsened by callous neglect by the government, inflation and blackmarketing, culminating in famine. In this Unit, we will discuss the various popular movements against the colonial rule.

22.2 END OF WORLD WAR II

With the end of the war came the release of the political prisoners, including the leaders of the Congress. Gandhiji had been released earlier, in May 1944, on grounds of ill-health. He had lost his wife, Kasturba, when in jail and his trusted companion of many years, Mahadev Desai. On coming out of jail, he had busied himself in constructive work, which soon became the main activity of Congressmen.

Almost a year before the final end of hostilities in May 1945, the Government in India, in its plans for the years ahead, had begun to discuss the possibility of a settlement between the two principal parties, the Congress and the League. The government was anxious to have in place a coalition government representing both communities, which would tackle the situation of political and economic instability expected to evolve on termination of the War. Demobilisation of army personnel, economic inflation, and release of political prisoners were some challenges the new government was expected to meet.

For this, the leaders of the Congress were released from prison, some after long terms of wartime confinement. Many Congress workers spent the entire War years in jail, having been incarcerated for opposing the War effort in 1939-40. Others had gone to jail for the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement in 1940, been released for a while and then detained again for their role in the Quit India

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Movement in 1942. It had been a long war for everyone, the leaders and the populace, and there was great relief at its end and more so at the release of political prisoners.

When the national leaders came out of jail after the end of the War and toured the country, they sensed that it was a matter of time before the British would go, maybe as early as two to five years. (Nehru's speech reported by the Fortnightly Report for the first half of October 1945 from United Provinces) They were amazed by the excited crowds which greeted them. The leaders had expected to find people totally dejected and subdued because of the repression of the War years. Repression, in fact, had steeled the determination of the people to continue the fight. No political activity had been permitted during the War and in any case with the leaders in jail and anti- British political parties and organisations outlawed, people had found it impossible to undertake any political activity. They awaited the release of the leaders and the legalisation of political parties with great expectations. A new era seemed to be heralded in which the struggle of the Indian people would make great strides towards freedom.

People stood atop treetops, waving in excitement or surrounding the cars of the leaders. They braved inclement weather to welcome Congress leaders and workers. The trains carrying leaders home were stopped intermittently by insistent crowds. The same scenes were repeated when the leaders went to Simla to participate in the conference convened by the Viceroy. In Bombay, where the Congress Working Committee met after three years, half a million turned out in welcome.

22.3 ELECTIONS IN BRITAIN AND IN INDIA

An interesting development was that the end of the War and the beginning of peacetime in Britain had not brought back Churchill and the Conservative Party to power as one might have expected. The architect of the Allied victory was a national hero, no doubt, and the nation was grateful for his leadership but practical commonsense influenced the popular vote. The verdict was in favour of the Labour Party, which was perceived by the populace to be best suited to lead a War battered nation in the task of reconstruction ahead.

The victory of Labour in the post-war elections signalled some changes for India. But, contrary to common perception, it remained within the broad imperialist framework as far as the colonies were concerned. Civil liberties were restored, ban on socialists lifted and elections were declared at the centre and in the provinces for the winter of 1945-1946. The Congress welcomed the opportunity to form ministries in the provinces and to elect representatives to the constitution making body that would be set up.

Election meetings soon became huge arenas of political mobilisation, much to the surprise even of Jawaharlal Nehru, who had criss-crossed the country in the run up to the elections in 1936-37. He confessed that he had not seen such crowds, displaying feverish excitement, earlier. Congress candidates fared extremely well at the polls too, and the party won over ninety per cent general seats while the Muslim League swept the Muslim constituencies. The election campaign became a massive exercise in mobilisation of the people. The issues taken up were very emotive ones; the excesses by officials while repressing the Quit India movement and the fate of the prisoners belonging to the Indian National Army (INA).

A major issue taken up in the election campaign related to the unprecedented repression witnessed against the 1942 movement. Many, including ordinary people and cadres, had been martyred in the cause. Setting up memorials to them and assisting their families was one aspect of the activity of Congressmen. The other aspect was taking up the cases where officials had exceeded their brief in repressing the movement. A typical election speech would relate the tale of repression with all details of brutality, move on to condemning the officials who were guilty and end with the promise (or threat) that Congress governments would enquire into these cases and mete out punishment to the guilty officials.

The immediate impact of the speeches on the morale of the officials was devastating. What made it worse for them was the prospect of Congress ministries coming to power in those very provinces, such as U.P. and Bihar, where repression had been exceptionally severe in 1942. Even the Governor of U.P. admitted that some actions were indefensible when "dragged out in the cold light of 1946". The Viceroy was of the opinion that only a gentleman's agreement with the Congress could solve the issue.

The second issue taken up in the election campaign was that of the fate of the members of Subhas Bose's Indian National Army taken prisoner by the Allies and put on trial for brutalities and war crimes. Jawaharlal Nehru hailed them as misguided patriots and called for leniency given that big changes were imminent in India. The Congress followed this up by passing a resolution in support of the cause. Well known Congress leaders like Bhulabhai Desai, K.N. Katju, M. Asaf Ali and Jawaharlal Nehru argued the case in court when the trials began at the historic Red Fort. In addition to legal help, Congress organised relief funds and arranged employment for the INA men. Congress election meetings were often indistinguishable from INA meetings.

The campaign for release of INA prisoners garnered massive public support. Newspapers carried the news of the Red Fort trials as headlines, giving it priority over international news. It was common for daily editorials to appear on the subject in the prominent papers, condemning the government and highlighting the sacrifices of the INA men. Pamphlets with titles like 'Patriots Not Traitors' were circulated widely and posters were put up in Delhi threatening death to '20 English dogs' for every INA man sentenced. At a public meeting in Banaras, it was declared that if INA men were not freed, revenge would be taken on European children.

So extensive was the mobilisation around the INA issue that in the first fortnight of October, 160 public meetings were held in C.P. and Berar alone where the demand for clemency to the prisoners was raised. INA Day was observed on 12 November and INA week from 5th to 11th November. It was common for 50,000 people to turn out for the larger meetings. The largest meeting was in Calcutta at the Deshapriya Park and organised by the INA Relief Committee. Nehru estimated the crowd to be over five lakhs.

The INA campaign had a wide sweep, both in terms of social groups and political parties covered as well as geographically. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau was of the view that "There has seldom been a matter which has attracted so much Indian public interest, and, it is safe to say, sympathy." Nehru felt that no issue had captured the imagination of the people as this one had. What was

striking about the mobilisation was that it was not confined to the cities of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras but extended to distant places such as Assam, Baluchistan and Coorg.

Participation in the campaign was extremely diverse. Donations came in from Indians abroad, Gurdwara committees, municipalities, film stars, tongawallas and the Cambridge Majlis. Students were most active, holding meetings and boycotting classes in protest. Shopkeepers downed shutters, especially on the day the trial began at the Red Fort, namely 5 November. The demand was taken up at Kisan conferences and women's conferences. Diwali was not celebrated in some places. All parties came out in support of the cause, from the Congress to the Ahrars, Akalis, Communist Party of India, Hindu Mahasabha, Justice Party, Muslim League, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Sikh League and the Unionists. The Viceroy summed it up, "All parties have taken the same line though Congress is more vociferous than the others."

Perhaps the most important aspect of the INA campaign was that it included social groups that had not been within the nationalist fold till then. These included government officials and men from the armed forces as well as loyalists. The Director of the Intelligence Bureau perceptively noted that sympathy for the INA is not the monopoly of those who are ordinarily against Government. This was partly because INA men came from families which had traditions of loyalty. One of the trio put on trial in the Red Fort was P.K. Sehgal, son of Achhru Ram, an ex-Judge of the Punjab High Court.

Apart from loyalists, government officials sympathised with the cause and some even contributed to the relief funds. Even men of the armed forces came out in support, attending meetings, sometimes even in uniform. The Commander-in-Chief spoke of the growing feeling of sympathy for the INA that pervaded the army. He advised the government to show leniency to the INA men on trial on the ground that the general opinion in the Army was in favour of leniency. The entire campaign revolved around the right of Indians to decide their own future. The issue pitted Indians against the British.

22.4 POPULAR UPSURGES

So far we have been looking at the general campaign for the release of the INA prisoners. The movement took another turn in November 1945 and February 1946 when there were violent clashes with authority. The first was on 21 November in connection with the INA trials, the second on 11 February over the sentence to Rashid Ali, the INA officer, and the third on 18 February 1946 around the Royal Indian Navy revolt. In all cases, protests by a group snowballed into confrontation, with people in the city and other parts of the country expressing solidarity.

The upsurge on 21 November 1945 began with a procession of students, both Hindu and Muslim, belonging to Forward Bloc, Students Federation and Islamia College. They occupied Dalhousie Square, the seat of the government in Calcutta, and were lathi-charged when they refused to disperse. There was an altercation with the police and firing led to two deaths and fifty two were injured. In protest, people in the city turned out in large numbers, leading to a paralysis of the city. Strikes quickly developed into pitched battles in which shops owned by Europeans were targeted.

On 11 February 1946 Muslim League, Congress and Communist students went in a procession to protest against the trial of Rashid Ali. Dharamtolla Street in Calcutta was the scene of the confrontation as Section 144 was imposed there and arrests were made and lathi charges took place. In sympathy, people of the city and other cities across the country, held meetings to show their solidarity. Often these meetings escalated into attacks on government and European property.

On 18 February 1100 naval ratings of HMIS Talwar went on strike protesting the treatment meted out to them. This included racial humiliation and unpalatable food. The ratings from Talwar were joined by those from Castle and Fort Barracks when the rumour spread that ratings had been fired upon. Angered at this, ratings seized Congress flags and went around the city holding these high, indulging in minor arson and threats to the police and even ordinary Europeans. In all, in Bombay city alone, thirty shops were destroyed, as were ten post offices, ten police posts and sixty four stores selling foodgrains. The workers went on strike in response to the call given by the Communists while shopkeepers shut their shops, making the paralysis of the city complete. Streets were sometimes barricaded, trains halted by crowds lying down on the tracks and police and military lorries were set on fire.

When word spread across the country, ratings revolted in other naval centres too. The ratings of the HMIS Hindustan took the lead in Karachi and another ship and three shore establishments joined in. Soon establishments in Aden, the Andamans, Bahrain, Calcutta, Cochin, Delhi, Jamnagar, Madras and Visakhapatnam were on strike. In all, 20,000 ratings, from 78 ships and 20 shore establishments, had taken part in the protest. Men from the other armed forces also came out in sympathetic support. In Bombay men from the Royal Indian Air Force struck work in Marine Drive, Andheri and Sion areas. Strikes by RIAF men were reported from Poona, Calcutta, Jessore and Ambala units. Armymen were not far behind in showing sympathy as reports from Jabalpur and Colaba showed.

The impact of these events was liberating in terms of the consciousness of the ordinary Indian. Even today when people hark back to those days, the RIN revolt looms large in their memory as an event which made the people and the government realise that the days of colonial rule were numbered. However, the upsurges were short-lived, their militancy lasting for a few days only. Calcutta, the scene of the almost revolution in February 1946, was quiet a week later, when the RIN revolt broke out. Six months later it was the scene of the Great Calcutta Killings.

The participation was limited to the militant sections of society in the urban centres. These upsurges did not directly touch the ordinary people in the villages. The unity demonstrated between the Hindu and Muslim communities, which, it is argued by some scholars, could have been the basis for averting partition, was organisational unity at best. The Communists came with their red flags, jointly hoisted them with the green League flags, but continued to turn to their own organisations for direction. The Muslim League actively took up the cause of Rashid Ali, a Muslim member of the INA. Muslim ratings turned to Jinnah for advice. Other ratings consulted the Congress or Socialist leaders.

Another perception which does not quite live up to reality is that the revolt shook the mighty empire to its foundations. The assessment of the Viceroy, a few days

after the naval revolt, was that the Indian army was most commendably steady. Erosion of colonial authority was one thing; determination to maintain the peace and ability to repress was another. Troops were used to suppress protesters in Calcutta during Rashid Ali Day and surrender of the striking ships was forced and ratings rounded up by troops. It is to be noted that Maratha troops rounded up ratings in Bombay, belying the belief that Indian troops refused to fire on their countrymen. Calcutta saw 36 civilian deaths by firing while the toll in Bombay was 228 civilians dead and 1046 injured.

Another popular misconception is that the Cabinet Mission came out to India in response to the RIN revolt. R.P. Dutt had made this connection in his classic, *India Today*. "On February 18 the Bombay Naval strike began. On 19 February, Attlee in the House of Commons announced the decision to despatch the Cabinet Mission." First of all this is factually incorrect. The decision to send the Cabinet Mission was taken on 22 January 1947. It was announced on 19 February but even this announcement was scheduled a week earlier.

Could it then be said that these struggles forced the British to move towards a substantive political settlement? Even here the British perception of their eroded authority was a long term one, in which they realised that their legitimacy to rule had been undermined by years of non-violent struggle. They were not thrown off gear by three upsurges in 1946-47, however militant they may be. Also, they understood that these upsurges were part of the widespread political activity spearheaded by the Congress; they only differed in form. One kind of activity was peaceful nationalist expression. The other was violent, militant confrontation with authority. The argument that Congress defused the revolutionary situation in the fear that disciplined armed forces were vital for when they would rule India does not appear tenable given government's apprehension of a Congress led revolutionary movement in the future.

The relationship of the Congress with the three upsurges was rather complex. Individual Congressmen and women took part in the agitation. Congress-minded student organisations were involved in the protests along with those linked with the Communists, Socialists and the Muslim League. Congress leaders condemned the repression in no uncertain words. The overall assessment of the Congress leaders was that the time was not yet right for an all-out struggle. They understood the repressive power of the state was intact and advised the protestors to heed this. Vallabhbhai Patel wrote to Nehru that "the overpowering force of both naval and military personnel gathered here is so strong that they can be exterminated altogether and they have been also threatened with such a contingency." Communists also realised this and their peace vans too went around the city asking people to stay peaceful.

The issue was not only about wrong timing or bad tactics, it was one of strategy. The Congress believed that the possibility of negotiations had to be exhausted before struggle could be contemplated. This was set out in a resolution of the AICC on 22 September 1945. "The guiding maxim of the Congress must remain: negotiations and settlement when possible and non-cooperation and direct action when necessary." This was the strategy of the Congress on the whole. In 1946 this strategy was buttressed by the understanding that colonial rule was nearing its end and a final settlement was on the cards. Given this scenario, it was prudent to be prepared for a struggle but ensure that no hasty steps upset the possibility

of a settlement. Negotiations were the first move in such a strategy, struggle was the card held in reserve. This is the strategic perspective within which the post war national upsurge and its relationship with the Congress is best understood.

22.5 STRUGGLES OF WORKERS, PEASANTS AND PEOPLE OF PRINCELY STATES

One common feature of most of these movements of workers, peasants and people from princely states was participation by the Communists. The Communist Party of India had not been in favour of mass struggles during the War years as it believed that the participation by the Soviet Union in the War made it a people's war. It was only when the War ended that the Kisan Sabha took up the cause of the jotedars in Bengal and the trade unions espoused the cause of the workers. Even then there was little strategic clarity. On the one hand the Communists supported Congress-League-Communist unity and looked to Congress to lead the anti-imperialist struggle. On the other, in August 1946, cadres were encouraged by the Central Committee resolution to sharpen local conflicts, the struggles around which could coalesce into a revolutionary alternative.

The common feature of these movements was that they were a protest against illegal, unjust, exploitative practices and exactions and low wages. In the case of the Warlis, forced labour and debt slavery were the main practices which were opposed. Couples were unable to get out of the debt trap they got into when they took a loan to get married. Sexual exploitation of women by the landlords and contractors was pervasive. The leadership of the Red Flag, combined with the respect with which the Warli tribals looked up to the Parulekars, the Communist Party leaders, empowered the people tremendously. In many instances, thousands of Warlis marched to the houses of landlords and freed slaves. Elsewhere the Kisan Sabha fought for improving the wages for grass cutting and felling trees.

In Bengal the struggle was for two thirds of the share, *tebhaga*, rather than the half share the cultivator was given by the landlord. The practice was that the landlord would, at the time of the harvest, stack the paddy in his godown and give the cultivator the one-third share. When the Floud Commission laid down a two third share as just, given that the *bargadar* (sharecropper) contributed manure, seed and plough too, the struggle gathered momentum and cultivators took the harvested crops to their own barns to signal that they were done with the old ways.

The strike wave of 1946 was on an extensive scale, by all standards, be it number of stoppages, number of workers affected and number of man days lost. Workers were hit badly by inflation and retrenchment. The issues taken up were wages, hours of work, bonus and food rations. A rise in wages was demanded as real earnings had fallen to 73.2 in 1946 (with the base year as 1939). The number of strikes were 1629, double the figure in the earlier year. Apart from industry, strikes also took place in government agencies such as the Post and Telegraph Department, South Indian Railway and North Western Railway, police units and ordnance depots.

Kisans in Punjab waged no-rent struggles in Ferozepur, Kangra, Patiala, Pathankot and Una. In Nili Bar, tenants agitated against illegal levies. Elsewhere, peasants protested against remodelling of canal outlets (*moghas*) which reduced water

supply while keeping water rates high. Harsa Chhina Mogha Morcha in Amritsar district was one of the more well known agitations led by Communists and participated in by Akalis and Communists.

In Travancore, fish workers, coir factory workers, toddy tappers and agricultural workers were mobilised by the Communist Party. The popular slogan around which the people were rallied was "Sink the American model constitution in the Arabian Sea". This constitution, devised by the Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, placed an executive nominated by the Maharaja at its core, instead of an assembly elected by adult franchise demanded by the people. Combined with political issues was protest at economic oppression by jenmis (landlords) and demand for higher wages on the part of the workers. The revolt of 1946 became associated with the names of its principal centres, Punnapra and Vayalar, though it spread widely in the Shertallay and Ambalapuzha talukas. 1000 men marched with lathis to seize rifles from a police station in Punnapra which had 20 armed policemen. Initially the attack was successful and rifles were seized from policemen, some of whom died in the attack. However, other policemen reclaimed the police station, killing many workers and forcing them to flee to camps where they sought refuge from martial law. On 27 October, some 400 workers in the camp were encircled and when 200 of them came out to face the bullets, almost 150 lost their lives. What took place in Punnapra was a cold blooded massacre.

It is often said that these movements constituted an alternative of mass struggle "from below" which could have brought unity; an alternative to the politics "from above" which brought the country to partition. However, these movements were not directly anti-imperialist in that the demands they took up were primarily economic, against local oppressors, zamindars, landlords, princes, notables, contractors, and capitalists. These vested interests were of course the social base of colonial rule and hence the movements against them also undermined colonial authority, but only indirectly. In a sense they could be described as the first round of post-independence struggles, which took up economic and social issues which had not been taken up in the concern of the movement with the primary contradiction with imperialism.

For one, some of these movements took place in later 1946, after the modalities for transfer of power were well under way. Second, they were not a continuation of the wave of anti-imperialist struggles in the winter of 1945-46, which had directly challenged the colonial state and its policies. These were often around economic issues such as wages and working conditions. They were directed against the landlords, capitalists and the princes, not against the colonial state itself. This does not mean that they did not have political significance, placed as they were in the context of impending freedom. Yet there is still a distinction to be made between economic struggles with a political dimension and direct, political action.

In my view, it is untenable that the Congress leaders moved to a compromise with imperialism because of their fear of these popular movements getting out of hand. The Congress leaders had always first gone in for negotiations with the colonial rulers. In fact struggle was intended to end in truce, which would then be worked to its full extent and preparedness built for the next round of the movement. Negotiations were to be entered into from a position of strength, not weakness. Years of mass struggle had eroded colonial hegemony irreparably and

pressurised the colonial power to enter into negotiations for setting up the mechanisms for transfer of power. In 1946 the Congress was not practising moderation as sometimes argued; rather, its leaders did not want to embark on a confrontation until it was known what the new initiative of the government, the Cabinet Mission, had to offer, in the context of statements made by senior British ministers that the British intended to leave India in the immediate future. However, a movement was to be prepared for which would be launched after the elections, when Congress ministries would be in power in the crucial provinces. Within this perspective, it was important to ensure that while pressure was to be kept up there were to be no premature outbreaks, as might have been the case had the agitations around the INA prisoners and the RIN revolt developed further momentum. Gandhiji commented that the ratings should not have revolted without a call from a prepared revolutionary party and criticised Aruna Asaf Ali, who was personally close to him, for "inciting" them. He explained that her call for unity at the barricades was misplaced as fighters do not always live at the barricades. The barricade has to be followed by the constitutional front.

22.6 SUMMARY

After the end of the Second World War, it was clearly felt in India that the days of British colonial rule were numbered. The election of the Labour government in Britain also helped in softening the imperialist sentiments. The elections in India were highly charged with the electorate split along communal lines. While the Congress won on most of general seats, the Muslim League swept the reserved Muslim seats. It was also a period of great national upsurges. The campaign for the release of INA prisoners, the RIN revolt, the peasant revolts in Bengal, Punjab and Kerala, strikes of industrial workers in many cities, and several such movements created an atmosphere of general disaffection among the Indian people. All these played their role in impressing upon the British that it would be better to end their rule in India.

22.7 EXERCISES

1) Describe the political situation during the 1945-46 elections in India.

2) Discuss the various forms which the popular protests took after 1945.

3) What was the role of the Congress with respect to the popular movements during 1945-47?

UNIT 23 TOWARDS FREEDOM-I*

Structure

23.1 Introduction

23.2 Simla Conference, 1945

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23.10 Exercises

23.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit traces the main political and constitutional developments following upon the termination of hostilities in 1945 to the end of 1946. Some of these milestones are the Simla Conference, the elections of 1945-46, the formation of popular provincial ministries, the ministerial level Cabinet Mission, the Interim Government, Direct Action by the Muslim League and Gandhiji in Noakhali and Bihar.

23.2 SIMLA CONFERENCE, 1945

The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, had been laying the ground for a political settlement which would be in place before the War ended. The end of the War was expected to bring with it a host of intractable problems, including pent up economic discontent and a standoff between the two principal parties, Congress and the Muslim League. He was of the view that a successful settlement of the Indian question would strengthen the future security of the Empire, ensure British prestige in the East, and even lead to India remaining within the Commonwealth. The specific steps of the settlement were to secure representation of the Congress and Muslim League on the Executive Council, to put in place elected coalition ministries in the provinces and elect representatives to the Constituent Assembly.

Soon after being released from prison in June 1945, important Congress leaders headed towards Simla, the summer capital of the Raj, to participate in the Conference convened by the Viceroy. Gandhiji took the line that he did not hold any official position in the Congress and that Maulana Azad, the Congress President, would be the Congress representative. However, he, Gandhi, would be present in Simla to advise the Viceroy during the Conference, should he so desire. The Simla Conference was held at the Viceregal Lodge, the summer residence of the Viceroy, in June-July 1945. The Muslim League was represented, among others, by its pre-eminent leader, Mahomed Ali Jinnah.

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The crucial point at issue at the Simla Conference was Jinnah's contention that the Muslim League was the sole spokesman for Muslims. Congress insisted on its right to represent Muslims, including nationalist Muslims, a venerable one being Maulana Azad, the President of the Congress. The British also found it difficult to ignore the claims of the Unionist Party of the Punjab, which represented Muslim landlords of West Punjab and Hindu smallholders of South East Punjab, and had contributed handsomely to the War effort in men and money. To underscore their point of not being a mere Hindu party, Congress included in its list of members for the Executive Council, representatives from non-Hindu communities. Jinnah insisted on his position as sole spokesman of Muslims being upheld and the Viceroy chose to ditch the Unionist allies of the British in favour of Jinnah and the League, whom they had helped during the War to make quick strides. Failure of the offer did not really put out the government: what was important was that the offer was shown to have been made.

The Simla Conference demonstrated, if a public avowal was still needed, given the government's overt espousal of the League during the War years, which the government considered its ally in the scenario that was to unfold in the post war period. However, the challenge posed by the Congress, indeed by the nationalist forces, continued to be formidable and the situation the government found itself in increasingly precarious with the rapidly eroding pillars of the state.

23.3 ELECTIONS OF 1945-6

The hopes for some political advance, dashed by the failure of the Simla Conference, once again revived with the coming to power of the Labour Party in Britain. An important initiative taken by the Labour Government was the declaration that elections to the central and provincial assemblies would be held in the winter of 1945 and spring of 1946.

The main parties in the contest were the Congress and the Muslim League. The elections were particularly important for the League in its quest for Pakistan. If it could gain a majority in the Muslim majority provinces, which could comprise the future Pakistan, this would strengthen its case for Pakistan. Its main weakness was organisational, but it was balanced by the active role played by the religious leaders, the *ulema*, *pirs* and *sajjada nashins*, especially in the Punjab. Some religious leaders gave *fatwas* in favour of the League while others portrayed the vote for Pakistan as a vote for the Koran. Another factor, which contributed to the success of the League in the elections in Punjab, was the local patronage network in which the landlords and *pirs* worked together.

The election campaign of the Congress, in contrast, was anti-British in its thrust. Congress slogans were "Release the misguided patriots" of the INA and "punish the guilty" officials who committed excesses in 1942. It was not anti-League in its tenor despite the elections being fought by the League on the issue of Pakistan. Given the primacy of the issue of Pakistan, it is surprising that the Congress leaders dismissed Pakistan as a slogan of imaginary fears. However, the Congress leaders increasingly conceded that if Muslims spoke out in favour of Pakistan, "it will not deny it to them".

For the League, the elections were extremely important, as they would give legitimacy to its claim to be the sole spokesman for the Muslims, who were, in

turn, decisively for Pakistan. The results in the Muslim seats did vindicate the stand of the League to represent Muslims, winning as they did all Muslim seats at the centre and gathering most of the Muslim vote. The same story appeared to be repeated in the provinces.

When it came to Muslim seats, Congress found it difficult to find Muslim candidates in the provincial elections. Many of those who contested appeared unlikely to win. This was a change from the optimism of Jawaharlal Nehru in November 1945 when he declared that Congress would put up candidates for every seat and that they would do well. In some provinces, Congress supported nationalist Muslim candidates, who often wanted the upper hand in the partnership, had big demands for funds and workers, and whose perspective was at times different from that of the Congress. While Congress preferred the straightforward Congress appeal in reaching out to the Muslim voter, nationalist Muslim organisations stressed cultural and religious rights. The worst blow was when those who promised an alliance with the Congress joined the Muslim League after being nominated or even after winning. This was the case with some candidates in Bengal and with the Ahrar Party in Punjab.

Congress leaders were divided on the issue of how to best contest Muslim seats. Maulana Azad felt there was an advantage in going along with nationalist Muslim organisations. Jawaharlal Nehru went along with Vallabhbhai Patel who felt the Congress should go it alone. In practice, the Congress joined Nationalist Muslim Boards and worked out sharing of seats with Ahrars, Jamiat-ul-Ulema and Momins, etc.

The case of Bihar showed that campaigning for Muslim seats involved large funds, amounting to three fourths of the total sum spent on the election campaign. As nationalist Muslim organisations generally took up the issue of religious rights of Muslims, they could hardly question the manner in which the Muslim League brought religion into politics. They could only pit *ulemas* inclined to their point of view against the *ulemas* and *pirs* fielded by the League. Nationalist Muslim propagandists ended up being no match for the sharper propaganda of the Leaguers. Early optimism on the part of the Congress leaders about winning many Muslim seats was replaced soon by the expectation that the League was likely to do well in the Muslim seats.

Some Congress leaders rued that they had not sharply targeted Pakistan as unworkable and injurious to the Indian Muslims. The Congress attempt to win over Muslims was ill timed, as Muslim voters saw the party as only interested in their votes, not in addressing their concerns. In Punjab, Congress leader Bhim Sen Sachar had predicted only two Muslim seats for the Congress. The election results returned the League as the single largest party in the Punjab.

Even after this disastrous showing in the Muslim seats, the Congress did not experience any profound realisation. It continued to interpret the political attitude of the Muslims in the old grooves. Congress leaders spoke of the need to improve the economic conditions of Muslims and ensure their representation in the Congress. It was as late as 6 October 1946, many months after the election results were known, that Jawaharlal Nehru accepted that the Muslim League was the authoritative representative organisation of an overwhelming majority of the Muslims of India. Here, too, a caveat was introduced, which the League was

unlikely to accept. This was that the League in turn should recognise the Congress as the authoritative representative organisation of the non-Muslims and such Muslims as have thrown in their lot with the Congress. The last clause negated the claim of the League to be the sole spokesman of the Muslims.

23.4 ELECTION RESULTS

In the elections to the central assembly in December 1945, out of 102 seats, Congress won 57, League 30, Independents 5, Akalis 2 and Europeans 8. In the elections to the provincial assemblies, Congress won 923 of 1585 seats, 23 of 38 labour seats but was defeated by the Muslim League in the Muslim seats. In NWFP, the League contested all 33 Muslim seats and won 15 of them. 19 Muslim seats were won by the Congress and 58.75 per cent of the Muslim vote went to the non-League parties. In Punjab, the League gained 73 seats, with its share of the Muslim vote being 65.10 per cent. The League gained 83.6 per cent of the Muslim vote in Bengal. It won 76 per cent of the total Muslim vote in India. This was a sharp rise from the 4.8 per cent vote in its tally in 1937. Elections of 1946 were a watershed. The results made it clear that the Congress represented the large masses of the country. It was equally clear, however, that the Muslim League spoke for most Muslims.

The Congress was to go on to form **governments in the provinces** of Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, Central Provinces and Berar and NWFP. The League formed ministries in Bengal and Sind. In Punjab, after the elections of 1946, some negotiations between Muslim League and Akalis were carried out with a possible coalition in mind. This had been unsuccessful and Akalis joined with Unionists and Congress to form a coalition ministry.

23.5 BRITISH DECISION TO WIND UP THEIR RULE

As we saw in the last Unit, the hegemony of the national movement over the Indian people was substantial by the time the war was over. Correspondingly, the influence of the colonial state was on the wane. The ideological instruments on which the state had relied to buttress its rule no longer served the purpose. The pillars of the colonial state, the army and bureaucracy, had been eroded. Diminishing numbers of British recruits had become a problem, which reached a head during wartime. By 1945 Indian recruits outnumbered British ones. Dealing with nationalist protest and long years of service without leave during the War had undermined the morale of the British officials. This erosion of colonial hegemony was apparent not only to colonial officials but also to the mass of people.

Bipan Chandra has described the strategy adopted by the Congress against the colonial state as struggle-truce-struggle. Colonial officials found this combination of phases of struggle alternating with phases of non-struggle extremely impossible to deal with. Policy moved between the two opposite poles of repression and conciliation. When non-violent movements were met with repression, the power behind the government stood exposed. Conversely, the government was seen to be too weak when it went in for a truce or appeared helpless in the face of open challenges. When the ship was seen as sinking, sections loyal to the government

deserted. Many who had stood by the government over the years no longer believed in its capacity to govern with prudence. They were shocked by the brutal repression of the 1942 movement and the callous attitude of the government to Gandhi's condition during his 21-day fast in detention in 1943. This led the services to wonder whether to take action against nationalist forces or not. Part of the difficulty was that the same set of officials had to carry out the opposite policies of repression and conciliation, often against the same political activist.

By the end of 1945 the government had reached a situation of responsibility without power. The prospect of a revolt by the Congress a few months down the line was considered formidable as Congress governments, by then likely to be in power in the provinces, would be on the side of the revolt. Here again it is significant to note that the assessment of the Viceroy was that "We could still probably suppress such a revolt" but "have nothing to put in its place and should be driven to an almost entirely official rule, for which the necessary numbers of efficient officials do not exist."

In late 1946, the British Prime Minister, Attlee, rejected the option of changing the nature of British rule to coercion and staying on in India, citing the following grounds: inadequate administrative machinery to implement a policy of rule by coercion; armed forces pledged elsewhere in line with international commitments; adverse opinion in the Labour Party; questionable loyalty of the Indian troops and the unwillingness of British troops to serve; adverse world opinion and an uncomfortable position in UNO. As colonial rule could not survive on the old basis for long, a graceful withdrawal from India became the overarching aim of policy makers. Of course, the digits of the post-imperial relationship had to be negotiated and modalities of transfer of power worked out.

But we have gone too far ahead and need to retrace our steps to New Year Day 1946. It was in keeping with his government's understanding of imminent departure that the Secretary of State in his New Year's Day speech on 1 January 1946 made it clear that Britain would be leaving in the near future. On 19 February 1946 Prime Minister Attlee announced in Parliament that a three-member Cabinet Mission would go out to India to set up the constitutional machinery for transfer of power. The decision to send a mission was taken on 22 January 1946. The announcement about a statement to be made in Parliament on 19 February was made a week earlier. A time limit to British rule was proposed but not accepted by His Majesty's Government as was the plan for the British to withdraw in phases to the provinces which would make up Pakistan. The apprehension of the Viceroy was that the government might not be in a position to wield power after March 1948. Hence a time limit was proposed as a way of giving time to reorganise and manage with limited powers.

From the side of the Congress, too, negotiations were generally tried out before going in for a confrontation. When independence seemed to be on the cards, Congressmen were willing to wait to see the substance of the offers being made. As Gandhiji said, a great nation has declared its intention to quit, what would be lost by waiting? Congress kept up preparedness for a mass movement, however, in the eventuality that agreement was elusive.

23.6 UNITE AND QUIT

By early 1946 the British had moved to the position that when they left India it was better to leave it united. The old stance of propping up communal forces was given up once it was decided that British rule was no longer to be continued. Post imperial strategic interests, which envisaged India as a partner in Commonwealth defence, implied reworking of their relationship with Congress. Moreover, Pakistan was not seen as workable by the governors of the crucial provinces, Punjab, U.P., Sind and Assam. Hence a policy change was warranted by both long term and short term considerations. Whereas a pro-Muslim League stance had been adopted at the Simla Conference in 1945, Attlee stated in the House of Commons on 15 March 1946 that a minority would not be allowed to veto the progress of the majority.

However, the Viceroy and some of his officials continued to believe that Jinnah would deliver better than the Congress. The Secretary of State on the other hand believed that Congress could create more trouble than the League. So did the Home Member of the Government of India, whose assessment was that a challenge from the League could be met, whereas a Congress rebellion would be difficult to suppress. So unity was preferred, both from the point of view of getting out of the political impasse and from the long run strategic perspective. One must not forget, however, that there were voices in the government who spoke out for Pakistan being a natural ally. This included the powerful voice of the Viceroy, who trusted Jinnah more than the Congress, which he dubbed as totalitarian.

The **Cabinet Mission Plan** was spelt out in two statements dated May 16th and June 16th, 1946. Whereas the latter statement hinted at the partition of the subcontinent and was rejected out of hand by the Congress, it found great favour with the Muslim League. Both parties accepted the 16th May statement in a manner of speaking, albeit with varying interpretations.

The Mission Plan envisaged three sections: A: comprising Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Berar and Orissa, B: consisting of Punjab, Sind and NWFP, and C: made up of Bengal and Assam. The centre would look after foreign affairs, defence and communications. Constitutions would be framed at the group and union level. Provinces could leave the group after the first general elections. A province or a group could ask for reconsideration of the group or union constitutions after ten years.

The difference of opinion between the League and the Congress was primarily over whether grouping was optional or compulsory. The Congress said it was assured by members of the Mission that provinces need not join if they did not wish to. It recommended this interpretation to Assam and NWFP, which did not want to be part of the League dominant Sections B and C. It challenged grouping and worked towards a strong centre, rather than a weak one. Patel discerned a shift from the earlier policy of the government of giving the League a veto and saw the Plan as a clear authoritative pronouncement against Pakistan. On the other hand, the League wanted to be able to question the constitution at the very start, rather than wait for ten years. The League accepted the Mission Plan to the extent Pakistan was implied in the compulsory grouping clause.

Clearly there was some doublespeak involved here on the part of the Mission. It said that sections were compulsory but grouping was optional. Members of the Mission, influenced by their personal predilections, gave contrary assurances to both parties, Congress and the League, in an attempt to bring them together despite their seemingly irreconcilable standpoints. The Viceroy thought he was trying to tease out the ambivalences but could not do so as he was partial to the League.

Nehru declared on 7 July 1946 that Congress reserved the right to give shape to the Constituent Assembly as it wished. This invited the League's charge of insincerity on the part of the Congress in working the plan. The League withdrew its acceptance of the plan on 29 July 1946 on the ground that Nehru's statement made Congress intentions not to play the game evident.

As British initiative and authority declined, a popular government appeared to be on the cards. Both the Viceroy and the Secretary of State agreed on the need for one, with the difference that the Viceroy did not want only a Congress government. He had feared this would happen given that the Congress held out the threat of launching a movement to pressurise the government to accept its demands. Admittedly, the possibility of this threat being put into practice had receded after the Cabinet Mission begun its deliberations. The British government feared a Congress government could adversely influence foreign policy in Indonesia, take up uncomfortable issues like that of the official excesses in 1942, retention of Gurkhas in the British Army etc. What is worth noting is that the government in London did not want a break with Congress and hence was willing to go far to accommodate the positions of the Congress on many of these issues.

23.7 INTERIM GOVERNMENT

So a pure Congress Interim Government was formed on 2 September 1946. Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as Vice-President of the Executive Council. This marked an important milestone in achieving independence and the inauguration was marked by festivities. The League, however, declared civil war and warned that Pakistan could no longer be prevented. No Muslim League members joined at this point, making the government inherently unstable, especially as the Viceroy was convinced that their presence was vital. He even put the blame for Direct Action on the Congress and the stances it took. He lost no opportunity to bring them in even though the League had withdrawn its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. In this he was supported by Attlee and his ministers who felt the danger from the Congress was now over. This was on 25 October 1946, within fifteen days of communal trouble breaking out in Noakhali. The League's capacity to foment communal violence had brought them into the government. The British were afraid that civil war would result if the League continued on the path of direct action.

The hope of the government was, of course, that the principal parties would adopt a stance of moderation once they became involved in running the administration. This did not ensue. The League did not forsake direct action. It did not send its best men to the Interim Government, except Liaqat Ali Khan, indicating its attitude that the real task lay outside. Ghazanfar Ali Khan, one of the five League ministers in the government, publicly declared that the Interim Government was merely another front of direct action for the League. This

prompted protest by Vallabhbhai Patel who demanded the speech be withdrawn before Khan took the oath of office. This had no effect on the Viceroy and Khan went on to invoke Mohammed bin Kassim and Mahmud of Ghazni and threaten that a few lakhs of Muslims will overwhelm crores of Hindus. A month later, another League minister declared at the New York Herald Forum that the struggle for Pakistan will now be carried on within as well as outside the government. Speeches were followed up by action in the Punjab, where League members of the Interim Government took part in the civil disobedience movement against the coalition ministry headed by Khizr Hayat Khan, the leader of the Unionists. Again Nehru protested to the Viceroy about this improper behaviour but to no avail. Elsewhere, to a colleague, he described "members of the Central Government being leaders of revolt in the provinces" as "fantastic".

Non-cooperation was the policy adopted by the League in its functioning in the Interim Government. Attempts by the Congress to lessen the powers of the Viceroy by meeting informally before the Council meeting were stymied by the League. Decisions by the Congress ministers, especially regarding appointments, were questioned as partial. Liaqat Ali Khan's budget was designed to upset the capitalist class, some of whom were supporters of the Congress. In later years Congress leaders were to describe the complete non-cooperation by the League in the running of the Interim Government as the factor that convinced them that there was little alternative to accepting the division of the country.

Gandhi's stand was different. He had told the British government from the beginning that there cannot be a coalition government between two incompatibles. They had to choose one of them. About the Constituent Assembly, he believed Congress should go ahead and form a Constituent Assembly when they had the strength to do so and frame a constitution for the areas it represented. An assembly under British auspices was a non-starter.

What Congress finally found impossible to accept was the League's refusal to join the Constituent Assembly. This amounted to rejection of the long-term aspect of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Elections to the Assembly had been held and the Congress had sent its representatives, while keeping the door open for the League. This was despite His Majesty's Government clarification on the grouping clause (in the 6th December 1946 statement) upholding the League's interpretation and the Congress accepting this. The League later demanded dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, indeed, scrapping of the entire Cabinet Mission plan, at the Karachi session of its Working Committee on 31 January 1947. But such was British propping up of the League that it continued to be in the Interim Government till 19 July 1947.

23.8 PAKISTAN DEMAND AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The demand for Pakistan, raised in Lahore in March 1940, acquired stridency by the summer of 1946. At the convention of Muslim League legislators at Delhi from 7 to 9 April 1946 it was clarified that Pakistan would be one nation though geographically spread across two regions. Unity of India was to be opposed by the sword if need be. Interestingly, Firoz Khan Noon threatened that if British impose unity, Muslims will be forced to wreak devastation worse than the deeds of Halaku Khan did. Jinnah made an appeal to Prime Minister, Attlee, to "avoid

compelling the Muslims to shed their blood" (6 July 1946). The League went one step further and withdrew its acceptance of the 16 May 1946 statement. Direct Action was declared to achieve Pakistan and to end domination by the British in the present and Caste Hindus in the future. Jinnah declared, "Today we have said goodbye to constitutions and constitutional methods." And he ended with "We also have a pistol".

The Council of the Muslim League had removed doubts, if there were any, about the sovereignty and integrity of the contemplated nation. (In later years, some scholars were to argue that Jinnah did not contemplate Pakistan as one nation or a sovereign one, it was only a bargaining counter.) The two parts in the north-west and east would comprise one nation, Pakistan, which would be a sovereign nation. Around this time Jinnah gave up constitutional methods and adopted the technique of Direct Action to reach his goal. This was based on his understanding of the clout of the Congress over the British and that the British government generally listened to troublemakers. It is worth noting that neither the British nor the Congress took Jinnah's threat of bloodshed and rioting very seriously. Nehru misjudged the League's ability to take to Direct Action, in his belief that reactionary landlords opposed to social change could hardly be expected to make revolution. Nehru challenged Jinnah to go in for civil disobedience, mockingly concluding: "I would like to see a revolution in India called by Mr. Jinnah. It is one thing to call for a revolution and another to carry out a revolution." This was underlined by Jayakar who reported Patel's conversation with some members of the Cabinet Mission in which he said that "the Congress could create more trouble than Jinnah's 100 mullahs".

16 August 1946 was declared as Direct Action Day. Trouble first broke out in Calcutta where a Muslim League government, headed by H. S. Suhrawardy, abetted the rioters. The slogans in Calcutta were *Larke lenge Pakistan, Lekar rahenge Pakistan*. Early Muslim initiative was met by Hindu retaliation and in the end 5000 people were killed. While Gandhi saw the Calcutta violence as bordering on civil war, Vallabhbhai Patel spoke of the "black and inexcusable crimes" which went beyond riots. Jawaharlal Nehru compared the League's government in Bengal with that of Hitler. Patel added that such a government would not exist for a day in a civilized country. Latter day scholars like Ayesha Jalal shifted responsibility for the violence in Calcutta on to the *mullahs* and *pirs* who were brought in to make Direct Action effective.

The effect of the happenings in Calcutta on the Viceroy was predictably to buttress his view that the Muslim League must immediately be brought into the Interim Government. Nehru in turn characterised this as "shaking hands with murder" and said they would have nothing to do with it. Far from revoking Direct Action after the tragedy in Calcutta, some League leaders went on to speak of "Jehad to achieve freedom for Islam in India". Jinnah himself warned that the impending installation of a Congress Interim Government would result in unprecedented and disastrous consequences.

The communal trouble in Noakhali and Tippera in East Bengal began on 10 October 1946. Apart from killings, which had been witnessed in Calcutta, abduction of women and forced marriages and conversion by force were distinctive features. The topography of the region made communication difficult and assisted the troublemakers while making the task of the officials out to contain

the violence difficult. In any case, the government showed little interest in controlling the situation. The Governor mistrusted the Premier, Suhrawardy and top civilian and army officials admitted to inaction and communal bias. The Secretary of State contributed to condoning the government by charging the Hindus with exaggerating what had happened.

This was a cruel reality for the Congress leaders in the Interim Government to accept; that they were powerless to stop the reign of terror that prevailed in East Bengal. Nehru was so upset by this situation of responsibility without power that he contemplated retirement. It was precisely this sense of helplessness and the situation of an impasse that the League intended to create. Fortunately for the Congress, there was Gandhiji.

Gandhiji went to Noakhali on 6 November 1946, after having sent the Congress President, Kripalani and his wife Sucheta, ahead to report on the situation. Gandhi's way was different from his colleagues in the Interim Government. His first priority was to bring the Hindus and Muslims together, inspire confidence among Hindus and get the Muslims to repent for their deeds. At a wider level, he wanted his experiment with building non-violent communal unity to be such that it could be made to work across the country. His understanding was that *ahimsa*, which had worked well against the British, had not worked satisfactorily in Hindu-Muslim relations and needed to be refurbished. Predictably, he saw this as his personal failure and vowed to subject himself to purification to root out the imperfection.

During his stay in Noakhali he held prayer meetings and visited Hindus and Muslims in their homes. He exhorted Hindus to return home. For him, living in clusters with other Hindus was a worse fate than death as it implied accepting the two-nation theory. Similarly he opposed the demand that Hindu officials be posted in Hindu dominated areas, pointing out this was showed a communal mentality. Both these stances have enormous importance for us today when dealing with communal violence today in India. After the initial period of surveying the area and assessing the problem, Gandhiji settled in a village and gave up all conveniences, including the company of his associates. The intention was to remove the flaw in society by searching for the imperfection in himself. This flowed from his belief, "as in the microcosm, so in the macrocosm". While his efforts to get Muslims to repent and Hindus to return to their homes and practise their faith met with some response, Noakhali was so strife torn and polarised that even Gandhiji had to accept that his mission was only a partial success. Hostility from Muslims continued, Hindus could not pick up confidence to return to their homes and colleagues in the Congress party were keen to have him back in Delhi and guide the negotiations at a crucial period in the country's history. The Governor of Bengal said somewhat dramatically, "It would take a dozen Gandhis to make the Muslim leopard and Hindu kid lie down together again in that part of the world."

Noakhali was followed soon by communal trouble in Bihar, especially Patna, Gaya and Monghyr districts. Here Hindus attacked Muslims and around 5000 lost their lives. The Viceroy accepted the League figure of 10 to 20,000 dead and described the Bihar riots as the worst ever during British rule, surely an exaggeration. The League encouraged Muslims to migrate to Bengal in large numbers. Nehru led from the front in suppressing the rioters, even threatening

use of machine guns and bombs. In some instances, those Hindus who defended the actions of the Bihar peasants as righting the wrongs of Calcutta and Noakhali, interpreted Gandhi's actions as anti-Hindu.

Gandhiji could only go to Bihar on 2 March 1947, though he had been disturbed by what had happened since the day he heard about it when *en route* to Noakhali in November 1946. He was in favour of an enquiry into what happened even though some of his colleagues opposed it as it may discredit the Congress ministry at the helm. In Bihar, he saw his task as getting the Hindu peasants to repent for their deeds and create an environment conducive for Muslim victims to return to their homes. Never one to hesitate to harness the positive aspects of faith, he referred to the doings as *paap* (sin) and sought to invoke *pashchaataap* (repentance) for them.

However horrific the violence in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar, it paled in comparison with the happenings in Punjab, beginning with Rawalpindi and engulfing the province thereafter. Tragically, the country was now thrown into the vortex of civil war, a qualitatively new phase and type of violence. This will be taken up in the next Unit.

23.9 SUMMARY

Various factors – exhaustion in the War, unavailability of suitable British persons to serve in army and administration in India, and the growing protests in India against the colonial rule convinced the British government that it would not be possible to hold India for long. However, they wanted to retain connections with India by keeping it within the Commonwealth. Initially, they wanted to keep India unified. The Congress also sincerely wanted a unified country. But the violence unleashed by the Muslim League in its demand for Pakistan made it difficult for the Congress to force the unity solution. A series of communal riots in Bengal and Bihar and growing communalisation made the situation in 1946 extremely volatile.

23.10 EXERCISES

1) Write a short note on the Simla Conference.

2) What were the results of elections in 1945-46? What did they prove?

3) Discuss the political situation in the country in the wake of the 'Direct Action' call given by Jinnah and the Muslim League.

UNIT 24 TOWARDS FREEDOM-II*

Structure

24.1 Introduction

24.2 Terminal Date for Withdrawal from India

24.3 The Move towards Partition

24.4 Why Did Congress Accept Partition?

24.5 Summary

24.6 Exercises

24.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit covers the period from the appointment of the new Viceroy to the achievement of independence. A time limit for British withdrawal was announced to bring urgency to the picture. The Cabinet Mission Plan cannot be retrieved despite talks in London in December 1946. Mountbatten comes out as the last Viceroy and soon moves to announcing partition of the country. The date for withdrawal is advanced to 15 August 1947. Congress moves to accepting partition while continuing to reject the two nation theory. Gandhiji too accepts partition, while calling for people not to accept it in their hearts.

24.2 TERMINAL DATE FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM INDIA

An important aspect of the British Government's decision to withdraw from India was the way it was presented. It was to come across as a step forward in the planned devolution of power, not as forced dissolution of imperial power. Accordingly, the 2nd January 1947 draft of the statement to be made by His Majesty's Government spoke of "the final stage in their achievement of self government", which "for the past thirty years…has been the policy of successive British governments."

At the heart of the new policy initiative was the appointment of a new Viceroy. It was announced that **Mountbatten was the last Viceroy**, and that the British would leave India by June 1948. In interviews for Lapierre and Collins' *Freedom at Midnight*, many decades after his term in India, Mountbatten asserted ownership of the idea of the time limit. However, this was incorrect. Wavell, the penultimate Viceroy, Prime Minister Attlee and members of the Cabinet were already in favour of a specific date for withdrawal, though for different reasons. Mountbatten insisted on its announcement, to convince the Indian public that the government meant business.

In December 1946, talks were convened by Prime Minister Attlee with Indian leaders to reconcile their opposed interpretations of the Cabinet Mission plan. Congress saw the plan as an alternative to partition and accepted compulsory

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grouping of provinces. This was partly because NWFP and Assam, despite having Congress governments, were placed in the sections which would make up Pakistan. In contrast, the Muslim League was all for grouping of provinces and accepted the Mission scheme in as much as compulsory grouping implied Pakistan. However, the London talks failed to bring agreement. The impasse remained despite Congress accepting His Majesty's Government's pro-League interpretation of the Mission scheme in the 6 December 1946 statement.

The Interim Government was intended to bring about agreement between the Congress and the League by virtue of jointly running the administration. Rather, it became a forum where the League waged civil war by other means. Nehru described the attitude of the League in the Interim Government as 'Non-cooperation from within'**.** The League opened battle on every front possible to somehow achieve Pakistan. The League members questioned appointments made by Congress ministers as well as most policy decisions. Congress members in the Interim Government found the functioning of the government to be severely compromised. Patel demanded that Leaguers should resign from the government given their intemperate speech.

This went on till 5 February 1947 when Congress members demanded resignation of League members. Though disruptionist tactics of the League members was the main ground for this demand, it was also pointed out that the Muslim League had refused to join the Constituent Assembly which had convened on 9 December 1946. This implied an ambiguous acceptance of the Mission Plan on its part. This in turn meant framing of the constitution was obstructed. The League only accepted the short term aspects of the Plan, namely the formation of an Interim Government, through which it hoped to reach its goal of Pakistan. When the Muslim League Working Committee met at Karachi on 31st January 1947, it asked for the dissolution of the Mission Plan. This was despite the 6 December 1946 statement by the Government accepting the interpretation of the League on grouping and asked Congress to assure that there would be a set procedure for the Constituent Assembly.

The statement issued on 6th December 1946 tried to resolve the conflict over grouping by putting forth the interpretation that the provinces had to necessarily group themselves into three sections and could only opt out afterwards. The government hoped to convince the Muslim League to join the Constituent Assembly. The Congress was divided on accepting the statement. Jawaharlal Nehru in a speech at the AICC meeting on 5th January 1947 proposed a resolution that the statement be accepted. The Congress Socialists and the Hindu Mahasabha opposed the statement. Sarat Chandra Bose feared that acceptance of the statement would mean surrender of rights of the Constituent Assembly and end of provincial autonomy. Congress eventually accepted the statement but urged the need to draft the constitution with agreement and without compulsion.

The ambiguity of the Mission was evident. The Congress perspective was one of regions inhabited by interwoven communities, which ruled out rigid territorial boundaries. However this position was not accepted by the British or by the League. The grouping scheme created problems for Assam in the North-East and Punjab in the North-West. The Congress leader, Bardoloi, feared that if Assam went into the Constituent Assembly dominated by Bengal, the Constitution would be written by Bengal, and Assam would not be able to break out because of

Bengal's numerical majority. Md. Tayabullah of the Assam State Congress feared that grouping would weaken the Congress.

Jawaharlal Nehru made it clear that grouping would not be imposed upon provinces. He was afraid that the Sikhs in the Punjab would get a bad deal in the constitution-making process. The Pratinidhi Panthic Board passed a resolution on 11th January 1947 urging the Congress to support the Sikh demand for communal veto on constitution making. The Muslim League termed the Statement as 'a jugglery of words' in a resolution passed at its meeting in Karachi on 31st January 1947. It withdrew its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan. With this, the Congress members of the Interim Government demanded the resignation of Muslim League members, but this did not happen.

Gandhiji tried to break the impasse with a new proposal to Mountbatten. He gave Jinnah the option of forming the government and offered Congress support. This plan met with protest and support. Eventually, Gandhiji withdrew the plan, declaring to Mountbatten his inability to carry the Congress along. Congress feared its followers would see this as Congress forsaking responsibility and worse, in favour of a person who had not given up the politics of violence and hatred.

For the Congress leaders the experience of office in the Interim Government worsened over time, given the obstructionist attitude of the League. Congress leaders felt it best to control some part of the country rather than have their writ run thinly over the whole country. Non Cooperation by the League in the Interim Government took the country closer to Partition. Nehru's appeal to Liaquat Ali Khan, the League leader, to meet and discuss differences as the British were fading out of the picture, got no response.

On the one hand, the government's statement was a response to the decline of authority of the colonial state and its instruments; on the other, it was a notice to the League that agreement had to be worked out by the given time limit. The government wanted to convey the message that it was no longer willing to give the League a veto on the political process. The statement was not clear about to whom power was to be transferred. Would India be united or divided? A clause in the statement said that if there was no agreement at the Centre, power would be handed over to whoever was in power in the provinces. The League went ahead to bid for power in the Punjab and overthrew the coalition government. This set Punjab on the path to civil war. Congress was convinced of the intention of the British to quit. Gandhiji said that the Congress provinces, if wise, will get what they want.

The direct action in Punjab brought about the downfall of the coalition ministry. The trouble in the Punjab began on 24th January 1947, when the ministry prohibited the volunteer bodies of the Muslim League and the RSS. The League called for a mass 'civil disobedience movement'. League leaders courted arrest in protest against the attack on the Muslim National Guards. They saw this as an attack upon the party. The government decided to withdraw its order four days later. The coalition ministry in Punjab, with Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana of the Unionist Party as its premier, resigned on March 3rd 1947. Negotiations were carried on to get the Muslim League to form the government amidst opposition from sections of Sikhs and Hindus. The demand for partition of the province by the Hindu and Sikh minorities picked up in the context of the League's extra-constitutional assault on a duly elected ministry.

The Congress Working Committee accordingly passed a resolution on 8 March pointing out that the provinces of Punjab and Bengal would be partitioned if the country was partitioned. If Muslims could not be coerced, non-Muslims could not be coerced too. By March 1947, and after the Rawalpindi riots, it became obvious that the Sikhs preferred partition of the province to domination by Muslims. By the beginning of April, Central Legislative Assembly members conveyed to Nehru their opinion that there was no alternative to partition.

The demand for partition of Bengal went back to the riots in Calcutta and Noakhali in 1946 when Hindus grew to distrust the Chief Minister. The communal disturbances in Bengal since 1946 centred on Calcutta, Noakhali and Tippera. There were killings and looting in cities like Calcutta, Rajshahi and Dacca. Violence was especially directed against women. On 5th March 1947 the Legislative Assembly called for action against the rioters. There was talk of dividing the province into Hindu and Muslim majority areas. This was more so among the minorities distrustful of the government. Gurkha policemen were attacked by Muslims, and Hindus targeted Punjabi Muslim policemen believed to have been brought in by the Chief Minister to Calcutta.

The Viceroy thought that the partition of provinces would reveal the limits of Pakistan and tried to convince Jinnah to this effect. Jinnah, on the other hand, saw the demand for partition of provinces as a bluff by Congress**.** Jinnah argued against the partition of these provinces on the ground of the cultural unity of Bengalis and Punjabis. Mountbatten turned the argument on Jinnah, saying that Jinnah's arguments about Bengali and Punjabi culture applied even more to the whole of India. He promised to revise his ideas about the partition of India. In the words of the Viceroy, Jinnah demanded his Pakistan be made viable and threatened to demand the partition of Assam. If Punjab and Bengal did not join the Constituent Assembly, while some parts of these provinces did, partition of Punjab and Bengal would ensue. This is how Nehru explained the decision of the Congress to demand the partition of the two provinces to Gandhiji. The division of provinces was the only answer to the Pakistan as demanded by Jinnah. Nehru made the comment that obviously the two nation theory was not meant to be applied in Punjab and Bengal.

Then came up the campaign for united Bengal, begun by Suhrawardy, the League premier of Bengal, and supported by the Viceroy. Gandhiji was against partition on any account. He was hence optimistic about the United Bengal scheme as it would question the two-nation theory. But on 9 June 1947 All India Muslim League Council accepted the 3rd June plan, which included partition of Bengal. It clarified that it was not in favour of the partition of the province but accepted it as part of the plan as a whole.

24.3 THE MOVE TOWARDS PARTITION

For the first two months after coming to India, Mountbatten tried to build agreement between the political parties. Very soon he realised that the Mission Plan was over. He found Jinnah stubborn about getting Pakistan and impossible to argue with. The alternatives before Mountbatten were few and he soon came around to the view that Partition was to be implemented.

The 3rd June Plan or the Partition Award advanced the date for withdrawal to 15 August. Boundary Awards were to be announced on or after 15 August 1947. When the date of 15 August 1947 was announced, there were only 72 days to quit and divide. This was to prove totally inadequate given all that had to be done. Even the exercise of drawing the boundary was both botched and rushed, with the Chairman, Cyril Radcliffe, drawing criticism across the board. Delaying announcement of the Boundary Commission awards to a period after the date of independence compounded the chaos and mayhem as many a village and town did not know which side of the border it was on. People found themselves on the wrong side of the border on 15 August 1947 and flags of both India and Pakistan were flown in areas claimed by communities pitted against each other.

To go back to early June 1947, Mountbatten's intention in advancing the date for transfer of power was to get Congress to agree to dominion status. Secondly, it was to let the British government escape responsibility for the worsening communal situation. The concern of the government was how best to come out of the crisis in the eyes of world public opinion. They did not care what happened to Indians. His Majesty's Government desired a gracious, smooth withdrawal from the colony and setting up relationships with both dominions, India and Pakistan. It could be said that **partition was not only the closing scene of Divide and Rule; it was also the first act of Commonwealth diplomacy**. His Majesty's Government wanted to demonstrate that their policies were characterised by impartiality and fair play. Also, since there was no agreement on a solution, an award was dressed up as an agreed solution. A point worth noting is that the 3rd June Plan was an award, whatever its projection by the British as a plan agreed to by Congress and League.

The British professed that they tried their best to keep India united. In fact, they took the easy way out by trying to please everyone, as Gandhiji pointed out to Mountbatten: "I suggest that the attempt to please all parties is a fruitless and thankless task. In the course of our conversation I suggested that equal praise bestowed on both the parties was not meant. No praise would have been the right thing." The British government did not really make a bid for unity. That would have involved supporting the forces for unity and opposing those against it. This they were not willing to do. They merely dressed up division as the maximum unity possible. As the British did not accept the main proposition of the Congress, namely unity, they limited Pakistan and met other demands of the Congress. For example, its stance on not permitting the princes to be independent, on Hyderabad or on Andaman and Nicobar Islands was accepted.

In mid April 1947, it was decided that provinces would only be allowed to join India or Pakistan, and that they would not be allowed to be independent. His Majesty's Government wanted the option of independence to be kept open, as it was keen that the mode of transfer of power was seen to flow from Indian, rather than British will. The Viceroy on his part was clear that partition must be limited to two successor states, and not lead to Balkanisation.

When shown the proposals in a draft form in May 1947, Nehru reacted in alarm, pointing out that they 'threw overboard the Cabinet plan…invited balkanisation, would provoke civil conflict and demoralise the police and central services'. Large Muslim majority areas would be free to opt out of the Union, something which the Congress had been against. He also expressed doubts over states

entering into treaties with the British if they so favoured, as this could jeopardize the territorial integrity of India. On the other hand, Jinnah stuck to his vision of Pakistan. The chances of a settlement did not appear bright.

Mountbatten proposed that he be the Governor-General of both India and Pakistan to ensure a common link between the two dominions. He was confident that Jinnah would welcome Mountbatten's presence, but Jinnah decided to be Governor-General himself, partly to show his independence from the British. Joint defence machinery was set up to act as a link between the dominions. But the Kashmir conflict in October 1947 ended any future prospects of joint defence.

24.4 WHY DID CONGRESS ACCEPT PARTITION?

Why Congress and Gandhiji accepted Partition is a question which continues to be asked today. Partition is seen as the result of the British policy of divide and rule or the supposedly age-old rift between Hindus and Muslims, depending on the ideological stance of the writer. Some left-wing writers have described independence as a deal between the imperial and Indian bourgeoisie, for which the nation paid the price of partition. Or else, that Congress leaders chose to have a strong centre rather than share power with the League. Or that partition took place because of the Congress leaders' lust for power, leaving the people betrayed and Gandhiji no longer wishing to live for 125 years. Why did Congress and Gandhiji accept partition despite their opposition to the two nation theory and the politics of Jinnah and the Muslim League?

Gandhiji's position was different from Congress but not opposed to it. He proposed to the Viceroy that Jinnah be Prime Minister. Gandhiji's hope was that this would satisfy Jinnah's ambition and help him give up his demand for Pakistan. Gandhi was right in thinking that this appealed to Jinnah's vanity. But by this time Pakistan was bigger than Jinnah. Even Jinnah could not withdraw the demand for Pakistan, had he so wished. Moreover, the Congress leaders felt the proposal was too risky. Handing over control to Jinnah would mean leaving the field open to reactionary forces. Also, many followers of the Congress would see it as betrayal by the party. Accordingly Gandhiji withdrew his offer.

In mid-April 1947, Gandhiji and Jinnah jointly appealed for peace. However, Patel pointed out that Jinnah must withdraw Direct Action for the peace appeal to be effective. Patel's suggestion was that Jinnah was not sincere in his appeal. This assessment was shared by Gandhiji. By the summer of 1947 Congress leaders had realised that it was impossible to conciliate communalism. Nehru described Jinnah as always wanting more. Elsewhere he said of Jinnah, "We are up against something which is neither political, nor economic, nor reasonable, nor logical." Patel was clear that there would be no more appeasement of the Muslim League. He also pointed out that independent India would not have communal weightages or communal electorates.

An alternative to partition was imposing unity by force. P.D. Tandon, Congress leader and Speaker of the UP Assembly and Ram Ratan Gupta, Congressman from Kanpur, propounded this view. Both condemned the "betrayal" by the Congress in accepting partition. But Congress leaders chose to accept Pakistan rather than compel unity. Nehru was clear that use of the sword and the *lathi* (long staff) could not stem the communal forces. It would lead to civil war,

which would have long-term consequences. He stressed this at the All India Congress Committee session on 15 June 1947. A couple of months earlier, Congress President, Kripalani, had told the Viceroy that "Rather than have a battle we shall let them have their Pakistan." It must be noted that Congress did not have state power at this point in time. Hence imposing unity would have meant fighting it out on the streets against volunteer armies of the communal parties. Hence when partition seemed inevitable, Congress tried to present it as based on the principle of self-determination, rather than as a communal demand. Gandhiji stated that the decision had been arrived at after taking into account the views of the people of all communities, be they Muslims, Sikhs or Hindus. Nehru explained partition as the outcome of the will of some sections to separate from India.

At the Congress Working Committee meeting on 1 June 1947, Congress President, Kripalani reminded the gathering that since 1942 it had been accepted that no part of India would be forced to stay on in India against its will. On 15 June 1947, at the All India Congress Committee session, he again said that acceptance of partition flowed from the clause of no coercion in the Congress resolution on the Cripps Plan. The fact that the settlement was final was crucial for Congress leaders in accepting Partition. Patel accepted the partition award on the ground that there was no further uncertainty. However, he was apprehensive at Jinnah's communal standpoint in his broadcast over All India Radio and the doublespeak in All India Muslim League's response, which made settlement unlikely.

The hope of India and Pakistan being reunited after some years reconciled leaders to the reality of division. It was hoped that once passions died down, common interests would bring people together and partition could be revoked. Hence Nehru appealed to people not to accept Partition in their hearts: "We have often to go through the valley of the shadow before we reach the sunlit mountain tops." However, if the two countries were to be reunited, any measure that cemented Partition was to be avoided. This could be dividing the army, transfer of population or parliamentary sanction for transfer of power to two dominions. The AICC resolution on the 3rd June Plan made it clear that partition was accepted as a temporary measure that would bring violence to an end. This was again repeated in Gandhiji and Nehru's speeches at the AICC meeting on 14-15 June. It is interesting that Gandhiji, who swore by non-violence, would rather "Let [the] British leave India to anarchy, rather than as a cock pit between two organized armies."

One positive aspect of Partition for Congress was that they would get a free hand in the rest of the country. Nehru spoke of 80 or 90 % of India moving forward according to the map of India he had in mind. Patel spelt out further what this freedom could be used for — to consolidate the armed forces and have a strong central government. Jayaprakash Narayan, the socialist leader, appreciated the "emergence of a strong Union Centre" that would follow Partition. However, Congress leaders continued to be apprehensive. Nehru felt that the plan could lead to fragmentation. This was because a large number of successor states would be allowed to emerge first and then given the option to unite. The British government wanted to show that provinces and princely states were free to choose their future. But the Viceroy limited fragmentation to partition into two dominions.

Congress accepted partition on the grounds that it reflected the will of the people and that it was the only way out. On 4th June, Gandhiji explained to the audience

at his daily prayer meeting that the Congress Working Committee had agreed to the vivisection of Hindustan as there was no way of getting round the Muslim League. It was not done under threat of violence. They hoped that Partition was temporary and could be undone once the imperialists were out of the picture and Muslim League realised its mistake in demanding Pakistan. Only options left before the Congress were waging an anti-communal struggle and using force, both of which could not be taken up. In the end, Partition was accepted by Congress as the failure of its strategy to draw in the Muslim masses into the national movement.

Gandhiji's reading of the communal situation was that both Hindus and Muslims had moved far away from non-violence. During his prayer meetings, he was asked why he did not start a mass movement. Those who asked him to give the call believed that a movement could either be against the British, whose fallout would be Hindu-Muslim unity or it could be an anti-communal movement. They believed that both movements would bring about unity. However, the potential of anti-communal struggle was limited as both the party cadres and the ordinary people had become communalised. Gandhiji was aware of his limitations: 'I have never created a situation in my life… People say that I had created a situation, but I had done nothing except giving a shape to what was already there. Today I see no sign of such a healthy feeling. And therefore I shall have to wait until the time comes.'

It has often been said that Gandhiji was ignored by his colleagues in the talks with the British ministers over transfer of power. Some argue that Gandhiji was helpless because of his disciples' alleged lust for power. It is sometimes said that Gandhiji was alienated from the Congress. However, Gandhi was not neglected by his colleagues, as often argued. His opinion on significant policy matters was sought even when he was in Noakhali by the Congress President, Kripalani and Nehru. They went there to meet him and persuade him to come to Delhi. Nehru appealed to Gandhiji when the latter was in Noakhali: "But I have an overwhelming feeling that vital decisions are being made and will be made in Delhi affecting the whole of our future as well as of course the present, and your presence at such a moment is necessary." Gandhiji acceded to his request subsequently but explained his position: "But I proceed the other way. I had learnt when still a child the formula, "As in the microcosm, so in the macrocosm." He hoped that if ahimsa could be shown to work in one small place, it could provide the answer to the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity in the entire country. In Delhi he met the Viceroy and participated in the Congress Working Committee meetings of 1 May, 25 May, 2 June and in the AICC meeting of 14 & 15 June 1947.

However, before the Congress leaders and Gandhiji came to accept partition, Gandhiji put in all he could to stop the communal violence. He toured the riot affected areas of Noakhali and Bihar from October 1946 to April 1947, applying balm to the victims of both Hindu and Muslim communal violence. The weapons he used were those of non-violence and 'satyagraha'. He wanted to dispel the fear and distrust between the communities. Complaints of Hindus in Noakhali and Muslims in Bihar were alike. Communal attitudes even permeated relief and rehabilitation work, as refugee camps in Bihar became centres of League propaganda. What was remarkable was the courage of those Hindus or Muslims who stood by Gandhi.

While Gandhiji's efforts were heroic, their impact was limited. Hindu refugees were slow to cast off fear and return to their villages. Muslims were hostile to him in Noakhali and elsewhere. Critics and colleagues alike were critical of his methods. Hindu and Muslim communal organisations expanded their influence in the atmosphere of communal distrust. If we look at the challenge posed by Hindu communal forces, we find that it took two forms, majority assertion and minority fears. Assurances could not take care of the insecurity of minorities. Hindu communal elements pressurised the Congress to place the interests of Hindus first and function as a Hindu body. After the creation of Pakistan on the basis of the two nation theory, the demand for a Hindu state became more strident. The demand then was for Congress to accept it was a Hindu, not a national body. Interestingly this was the same as the position of the government that the Congress should accept that it was a caste Hindu body. Congress leaders had refused to do so, recognising this was an issue of legitimacy, of its national character, not one of pragmatism as made out by those who argued for this. Even when it accepted the creation of Pakistan as unavoidable in the given circumstances, the Congress did not accept the two nation theory, the communal principle on which Pakistan was demanded.

India became independent on 15th August 1947. Nehru made his 'tryst with destiny' speech at the midnight session of the Constituent Assembly on the night of 14th August 1947. The session began with the singing of *Vande Mataram* and the President's address. The next morning messages of congratulations were received from countries across the world. Gandhiji spent the day in Calcutta, praying, fasting and spinning. Political prisoners were released to mark the coming of freedom. Public ceremonies were held in all major cities to mark the day. Most celebrations on this day took note of the harsh reality of partition. 15 August 1947, then, was an occasion for both mourning and celebration. It marked independence and partition, which in turn reflected the success and failure of the anti-colonial movement—success in wresting independence, and failure in not being able to bring the majority of Muslims into the national movement.

24.5 SUMMARY

The period 1945-47 was one of the most volatile in Indian history. Anti-colonial popular upsurges, huge demonstrations against colonial rule, elections which starkly revealed a communal division in the country, decision by the British to leave India, large-scale communal riots in Bengal and Bihar, acceptance of partition by all major parties, followed by even bigger riots in Punjab, and finally the attainment of independence were all witnessed in such a short time-span. The dawn of freedom elicited contrary reactions – triumph and anguish and the creation of new identities and the questioning of old ties. In this Unit, we have tried to convey a sense of the period which was extremely decisive in the long history of our country.

24.6 EXERCISES

1) Why did the Congress accept the partition of India?

2) What did Gandhi do to pacify the sentiments during the riots of 1946? How far he was successful?

3) Discuss the role of the Muslim League during this period.

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Indian National Movement

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Block

6

NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL GROUPS-I

UNIT 25
The Peasantry **5**

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BLOCK 6 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL GROUPS-I

Introduction

The Indian Nationalist Movement, in order to be truly national, had to encompass various classes and groups. It could not afford to take on board one or two classes and leave the rest because it would have created unmanageable social tension. At the same time, it was difficult to reconcile the interests of the antagonistic classes and to bring them together with the same fervour in the movement. The conflicts between the peasants and the landlords, and between the workers and the capitalists were increasingly getting intensified. This Block discusses in detail the relationships between the Congress (and the nationalist movement) and various classes over the period.

In **Unit 25**, the relationship between the nationalist movement and the peasantry has been discussed. The peasant agitations against the colonial rule began right since the beginning of the establishment of the colonial rule in 1757 in Bengal. For over a century, these agitations were led by the traditional leadership. In the late nineteenth century, some middle-class, modern educated persons took up the cause of the peasants and tribals and voiced their demands. Early nationalist leaders bitterly criticised the colonial government for being responsible for the poverty and misery of the peasantry. But it was only in the early twentieth century that the nationalist movement reached out to the peasantry and supported the movements of the latter. Gandhi was the most important nationalist leader who seriously attempted and succeeded in drawing the peasants into nationalist fold. From around 1918, the peasants became increasingly associated with the nationalist movement. However, the Congress, the premier nationalist organisation, sought to restrain the class-antagonism inherent in peasant movements against the landlords because it did not want to alienate the landlords. The main objective of the Congress was to direct peasant movements against imperialism. But in this quest, many just demands of the peasants were not taken up. Nevertheless, the Congress and the nationalist movement in general played the crucial role of imbuing the peasant movements with modern consciousness and in expanding the scope and visibility of even smaller struggles.

The rise of modern industry resulted in the rise of the modern working class. The organised working class was a very small proportion of the Indian population during colonial times. But it was concentrated in certain cities and towns and could be effectively mobilised for political purposes. Nationalism, as the predominant ideology of the time, had its impact on the workers. However, the relationship between the workers and the nationalists, particularly represented by the Congress, was not always close and uniform. It is the nature and dynamic of this association that we will discuss in **Unit 26**.

The **Unit 27** deals with the relationship between the Congress and the Indian capitalists. The modern Indian capitalist class emerged during the late nineteenth century under the shadow of colonialism. It did mature in the twentieth century since the First World War, grew in number, and was able to acquire a dominant position in many industries. However, the attitude of the capitalists remained ambivalent towards the nationalist movement. It generally did not support the

mass movements, and extended its support to the Congress mainly during the constitutional phases when the Congress adopted a moderate tone. Only during the 1940s, when it had become clear that the Congress would come to power, the capitalists openly sided with the Congress and its policies.

The **Unit 28** discusses the position of the landlords in the colonial society, their links with the colonial government, and the ambivalent attitude of the Congress towards them. It is generally accepted that the position of the landlords radically changed after the failure of the revolt of 1857. Their independence was undermined and they became completely subservient to the colonial state. For their support to the colonial government, they were awarded with more positions and economic leverage. The Congress, pursuing its agenda of unity among Indians of all classes, did not want to rattle the landlords by supporting the radical demands of the peasant movements. However, the increasing intensity of the peasant movements in many parts of the country, and the rise of leftist leadership within the Congress and the Communists outside it, made their position untenable. Ultimately, the Congress, which was to assume power after independence, decided that landlordism had to be abolished with or without compensation.

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UNIT 25 THE PEASANTRY*

Structure

25.1 Introduction

25.2 Debate on the Relationship between Nationalism and the Peasantry

25.3 The Condition of the Peasants under Colonialism

25.4 Peasants and the Early Nationalism

25.5 Mass Nationalism and the Peasantry

- 25.5.1 Gandhi and the Peasantry
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25.1 INTRODUCTION

The establishment of colonial rule in Bengal in 1757 triggered resistance from many sections of Indian people, including the peasantry. The peasants' resistance to colonial exploitation and intervention in their lives took various forms ranging from everyday resistance to rebellion. For about a century, these resistance movements were led by dispossessed zamindars, local notables, monks and other religious leaders, and peasant or tribal leaders such as Birsa Munda. These movements culminated in the general revolt against British rule in 1857. Some important peasant rebellions occurred till the end of the century, such as Munda rebellion. However, after 1857, we find increasing involvement of middle-class, modern educated persons in peasant resistance movements. As the idea of nationalism gripped the persons educated in modern system, these ideas, in some form or the other, were carried to the peasantry also. In this Unit, we will discuss the interaction between nationalism and peasantry to explore its various dimensions.

25.2 DEBATE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND THE PEASANTRY

The historians have varied views regarding the relationship between the Congress, the foremost nationalist organisation, and the peasants. In this section, we will discuss the views of some historians on this issue.

The nationalist historians either pay little attention to peasant agitations or view the peasants as inert masses who were woken up by the nationalist leaders for participation in nationalist struggles. It is assumed that the peasants were apolitical to whom the nationalist activists brought the politics. The peasantry is generally seen as an undifferentiated mass whose arrival in the political arena was due to influence of the Gandhian nationalism. Thus, the peasant movements in the twentieth century were subsumed within the nationalist movement.

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Most of the writings on peasantry belong to the broad Marxist approach. Although the Marxist historians accept that the nationalist movement made tremendous impact on peasant consciousness and movement, they tend to view the influence of the Congress, particularly Gandhi, as negative. They conceive the nationalist movement as bourgeois which preserved the interests of the propertied classes and was inclined to hinder, curb or even suppress the movement when it became militant. They argue that the Congress did not take up the anti-landlord demands of the peasants and discouraged the class organisations of the peasantry. R.P. Dutt and A.R. Desai formulated the basic Marxist approach regarding the attitude of the Congress towards the masses, and many later Marxist historians followed in their wake. [For details on Marxist views, see S.B. Upadhyay 2015].

In his early writings, Bipan Chandra takes a critical view of Congress' policy towards the peasants. He states that 'In the name of national unity against imperialism, the peasants' interests were more or less completely sacrificed. National integration was promoted at the peasants' unilateral cost. For years the National Congress failed to evolve a broad based agrarian programme. All the three major movements launched by Gandhi namely, those of 1920, 1930 and 1942, started without any such programme.' He even argues that in case of a confrontation between the peasants and the landlords, Gandhi usually tried to moderate peasants' demands and restricted their militancy. So far as taking up the crucial peasants' demands are concerned, the record of the Congress Ministries from 1937 to 1939, 'was in this respect quite dismal. Their agrarian legislation was weak and meagre, the only significant relief being given vis-à-vis moneylenders. Above all, their attitude towards the peasantry was not favourable.' In the 1940s, although the Congress adopted the measures which resulted in the abolition of zamindari, it did not benefit 'the mass of lower peasantry'. Such stance of the Congress was determined not by deferring to the interests of the big landowners and zamindars, but due to the needs to accommodate the interests of the rich peasants, the small and ruined landlords, certain sections of the middle classes who owned lands and were also involved in petty moneylending, and merchants and moneylenders who were closely involved in various operations in the countryside [Bipan Chandra 1976: 18-21].

Sumit Sarkar, in an essay, 'The Logic of Gandhian Nationalism' (1985), argues that the Congress politics of mass mobilisation, under its tight organisational control, 'fitted in perfectly with the interests of a bourgeoisie, which needed to utilize mass discontent, and yet wanted to keep it within bounds'. Even during the 1940s, the 'Fear of popular "excesses" made Congress leaders cling to the path of negotiation and compromise, and eventually even accept Partition as a necessary price'.

According to Dhanagare, the 'most important social function of the Gandhian "constructive" activities was that of tension management, which explains the alliance of rich landowners with their tenants and labourers' [D.N. Dhanagare 1983: 104]. According to Kapil Kumar, Congress bourgeois leadership 'exploited the peasants' support to secure political independence oblivious of the economic aspect of swaraj and the demands of the peasantry'. And the main 'cause of the withdrawal of the two mass movements (1920-22 and 1930-2) had been the fear of no-rent campaigns which meant adding anti-feudal struggle to anti-colonial struggle' [Kapil Kumar 2011: 146, 147]. He even argues that 'Gandhi had in reality exercised a restraining influence on the revolutionary potentiality of the

peasants at Champaran which might have erupted into militant struggles but for his intervention' [Kapil Kumar 1983: 17, 19].

Several studies on peasant movements emphasise on the leadership of the village elite who provided the bulk of Congress support in rural areas. D.A. Low and Jacques Pouchepadass underline the role of the 'dominant peasants' playing crucial role in the agrarian movements in general and in the nationalist movements in particular. This dominant peasantry was actually those groups of peasants who were considered as natural leaders in the villages. They manage to bring along the lower classes and castes of villagers in any movement they support. [See Shahid Amin 1988: 106].

One of the most important historiographical trends, the subaltern historiography, dismisses all other writings as 'elite', or even belonging to the discourses of 'counter-insurgency' which tend to depict the peasant rebels as anarchists or disruptive. In the subalternist view, the national movement led by the Congress was elitist which hampered the growth of peasant rebellions against the Raj. The peasant movements developed independently of the national movement and there was no close, positive relationship between Congress nationalism and the peasantry. Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, Partha Chatterjee, Gyanendra Pandey, and David Hardiman are some important subalternist historians who have written on this issue.

Mridula Mukherjee offers a spirited defence of the Congress' role in initiating and sustaining the peasant movements in several areas. According to her, the national movement played an extremely crucial role in generating peasant movements, particularly after 1918. Since then, the peasant struggles 'tended to emerge either alongwith and as part of the national struggle or in areas and among sections that had at one time or another felt the impact of the anti-imperialist struggles.' The cadre and the organisations which had earlier played a role in the national movement were later actively involved in launching and sustaining the peasant struggles. Even the activists The strong Kisan Sabha movements during the 1930s were basically based on this new cadre. Gandhiji, in particular, played the most important role in this. The national movement was a multi-class movement, based on the ideology of anti-imperialism. This necessitated the adjustment of peasants' class demands to the overall requirements of the nationalist movement. Therefore, even if the idea of restraining the peasant movements at certain points of time is proved, it would not mean that 'the peasantry was betrayed or its interests sacrificed'. Such tactical adjustments are part of a common struggle in which many groups with different interests participate. [See M. Mukherjee 2004].

25.3 THE CONDITION OF THE PEASANTS UNDER COLONIALISM

In colonial India, the peasant movements arose mainly as a result of the many changes introduced by the British in the agrarian structure of the country. The pre-colonial system of rights and entitlements in the land was deeply disturbed by the new land revenue policies imposed by the British which strongly favoured private ownership of land. For the wars of expansion pursued by the East India Company, increasingly more finances were required. Agriculture was the main source of revenue. Initially, a system of revenue farming was introduced and the

job of the collection of revenues was assigned to the highest bidders. This led to extreme exploitation of the peasants, poverty and famine, and unrest among the people. Later, to make the land revenue collection more regular, three land revenue systems were introduced in various parts of India: Zamindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari. In all this, the revenue demand was pegged at a very high level in permanently settled area which prompted the zamindars to extract even more from the tenants. In Ryotwari areas, there was a provision for periodic revision which resulted in increase of rent every few years which proved a burden on the peasants and did not give them an opportunity to save. High burden of taxes and strict collection in time, without remission even in times of adversity, forced the peasants to borrow from moneylenders. Over time, this indebtedness resulted in increasing loss of peasants' control on land.

Gradually, colonialism brought about significant changes in the rural areas, particularly in the structure of land relations. Traditional structures of economic relationship were displaced by new economic relations and institutions which had absentee landlords and moneylenders at the top, and share-croppers, tenants-at-will and agricultural workers at the bottom. There occurred a phenomenal increase in the number of intermediaries between the state and the peasants. There was a decline in agricultural productivity, stagnation in agricultural output, decrease in per capita availability of food, and impoverishment of the peasantry. The colonial emphasis on strict delineation of private property assigned most of lands to the landlords which resulted in the hardship of the peasant-cultivators. Thus, by 1947, most of cultivable land was owned by the landlords of various types, one very important category being that of the absentee landlords. Many moneylenders became landlords. There was also a concentration of land in the hands of upper landlords. Thus, in UP during the 1930s, just 1.5 per cent of the landlords possessed 58 per cent of land. In Bengal province, 13.8 per cent of the landlords owned 39.3 per cent of land with an average holding on 1228 acres per estate. Another important development in the rural areas was the increasing hold of the usurer who became a crucial link in the chain of colonial surplus extraction. The moneylender ensured that the revenue was paid to the colonial government in time, even though the peasants had to remain indebted during most of their lives. The usurer also lent money for growing of commercial crops and their export. Many landlords also lent money. Thus, there was a strengthening of both the landlords and the moneylenders during the colonial period, and they were able to extract whatever gain the peasants could have made by selling their commercial crops. These developments resulted in differentiation among the peasantry and the immiseration of the majority of them. Only 29 per cent of the rural population consisted of peasant proprietors while around 60 per cent were tenants-at-will, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers.[Bipan Chandra 1976:3-7]

All these developments created increasing discontent among the peasants against moneylenders, landlords, and the colonial state. Resistance and rebellion had occurred since the beginning of the British rule. The rise of the nationalist movement provided the peasants new avenues to voice their grievances.

25.4 PEASANTS AND THE EARLY NATIONALISM

During the second half of the nineteenth century, after the Revolt of 1857, the middle-class involvement in peasants' problems and their agitations was noticeable. These individuals served as important intermediaries between the

peasants and the colonial administration. They also occasionally played the role of leaders in peasant movements. One of the early peasant agitations with some involvement of middle-class nationalist-minded intelligentsia was the indigo rebellion in Bengal in 1859-60. The peasants in many parts of Bengal had refused to plant indigo for the European planters who had been forcing the peasants to cultivate it. The Bengali intellectuals brought this issue to the notice of Indian public. The play *Neel Darpan* by Dinabandhu Mitra in 1860 depicted planters' oppression and peasants' protests. In Bombay Presidency, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was the first to associate itself with peasant grievances when it began espousing the cause of the peasants in the Presidency. The peasants sought help and guidance from its Poona-based leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale. These leaders helped the peasants with the drafting of memorials and petitions thus articulating their problems better. In Punjab in 1907, the peasants in the Chenab Canal Colony organised agitation against the draconian colonial laws which interfered in the inheritance of land. Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh from Lahore Indian Association were among the leaders of this movement. The peasants withheld the payment of taxes and at many places militant demonstrations took place. In other parts of the country also, similar anti-government peasant protests were witnessed with some involvement of the nationalist intelligentsia.

The nationalist leaders and the Congress in the early period were fully aware of the problems facing the peasantry and held the colonial administration responsible for them. They criticised the British for burdening the peasants with high revenues. They asked the government to lower the revenue demands on the peasant, and pleaded that the revenue demands should be fixed permanently and should not be increased periodically. They blamed the government's revenue policies as responsible for increasing poverty among the peasantry and frequent famines. Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, Dinshaw Wacha, G.K. Gokhale, B.G. Tilak and many other nationalists took up the issues which aggrieved the peasantry. In several resolutions, the Congress raised the problems of distress among the peasants.

However, the Congress ignored the demand for a permanent fixation of rent and tenure in Zamindari areas. The Congress in the early period also did not pay attention to the fact that all farmers for whom it was demanding proprietary rights did not cultivate the land. Thus, the Congress generally failed to take a strong anti-landlord and pro-peasant stand. In Bengal, there was another trend surfacing. The peasant movements in several parts, representing the majority Muslim peasantry, got gradually alienated from the middle-class nationalists who took a pro-landlord position. Similarly, the Congress did not take the side of the peasants in Punjab when the issue of land alienation to the moneylenders and other non-cultivating classes came to fore.

Thus, although the earlier nationalists felt quite concerned about the peasants, they were not particularly interested involving them in the nationalist movement. The politics of the moderates was not based on appealing to and involving the masses, and the appeal of the extremists remained confined to the urban population.

25.5 MASS NATIONALISM AND THE PEASANTRY

A closer relationship between the Congress and the peasants was forged in the period of mass nationalism beginning in 1918. Since then, the Congress and other nationalist leaders became increasingly involved with the peasants in various ways. In this section, we will discuss the different dimensions of this association.

25.5.1 Gandhi and the Peasantry

The peasants were not much involved in Congress politics until Gandhi came on the scene. The active involvement of Gandhi drastically changed the nature of nationalist association with peasantry. Now the actual work of integrating peasants with the national movement started which shifted the focus of the national movement from constitutional to mass politics. Gandhi considered the peasants as a very important force which needed to be mobilised if the Congress had to fight against colonial rule. Champaran in Bihar and Kheda in Gujarat provided the ground which disseminated the pro-peasant ideology of Gandhi, brought him to notice as the leader of the masses, and linked the nationalist movement to the peasantry. In Champaran, the peasants were agitating against the planters who were not only forcing the peasants to grow indigo under the exploitative *tinkathia* system (a kind of forced cultivation of indigo in 3/20th of land held by the peasant) but also paid a price for indigo which was even lower than that of the food crops. One of their leaders, Raj Kumar Sukul, contacted the nationalist leaders, including Gandhi, to come and see the problems of the peasants. After some hesitation, Gandhi agreed to lead the movement. The peasants responded with enthusiasm effecting huge mobilisation in the area and defied the British authority. Acts of violence also took place and some local landlords were also attacked. Gandhi and the Congress did not approve of these acts. Nevertheless, the peasants showed faith in Gandhi and the Congress, and this area became a base of nationalist mobilisation even later. Gandhi's intervention brought the hated *tinkathia* system to an end and helped in determining the rent payable by the peasants to the planters. Gandhi's success in Champaran was looked upon as an important victory which immediately made him famous on the national scene.

Similarly in Kheda, on the request of the local peasant leaders, Gandhi decided to support the struggle of the peasants for revenue remission in 1918. The local peasants, largely belonging to the Patidar caste, were feeling very discontented with the government because of the extremely strict schedule of land revenue collection. In 1918, the peasants had lost about 25 per cent of their crop due to excessive rains. They wanted that the land revenue installments should be suspended. They sent several petitions to the government. However, the Government was adamant on recovering its dues as per its schedule. The peasants launched agitation to fight against this injustice by deciding to withhold the payment of land revenue. Gandhi supported their just demand. Although the struggle did not succeed, the government at least agreed not to confiscate the property of the non-paying peasants. This area also remained a nationalist base for a long time to come. In both these movements, the peasants had started the struggle on their own before contacting Gandhi and other nationalists for support and leadership. The mobilisation of the peasants was largely independent of the Congress. However, these areas became nationalist strongholds in subsequent nationalist movements against the British rule.

In Bardoli, the nationalist leadership, between 1921 and 1927, undertook the task of generating a model peasant movement by linking the local peasant discontent with the larger problem of nationalism. The issue was the periodic upward revision of land revenue without paying attention to the ground situation. The peasants of this region had begun agitation to oppose one such revenue enhancement which would be done in 1925-26. The government did not care about the agitation and increased the revenue demand. In protest against this arbitrary increase, the peasants, in consultation with the nationalist leaders, decided to implement complete non-payment of land revenue in 1927. This started the famous Bardoli movement. The nationalist leaders fully supported the movement and Gandhi ashrams of the area helped in mobilising the peasants and sustaining the movement. The government tried to forcibly collect the entire revenue but failed to do so. Finally, a compromise was reached and the revenue demand was lowered.

Gandhi clearly perceived that the involvement of the peasant masses in the nationalist movement was essential if the Congress claimed to represent the nation and fight successfully against the British rule. He, therefore, sincerely endeavoured to bring the peasants into nationalist fold by propagating his constructive programme, village uplift, *charkha*, and *swadeshi*. But his focus was on the nation as a whole and he did not wish to alienate any section within Indian society. He, therefore, assiduously avoided taking up any contentious issue which would create a wedge between the peasants and their immediate oppressors such as moneylenders and landlords. Gandhi did not wish to create or support class conflict between either the peasants and landlords or between the peasants and agricultural workers, but he also did not want to alienate any section whose demands were not taken up by the Congress. Thus, although Congress main support base was among the rich and middle peasantry, Gandhi's constructive programmes helped the Congress to spread nationalist message among the poor peasants and agricultural workers as well, quite often cutting across caste lines. Gandhi panchayats were formed in many villages as nationalist organisations to propagate the Gandhian ideas about khadi and abstention from alcohol and drugs. They sometimes also asked the villagers to eschew non-vegetarian food. These panchayats could be led by persons of any caste, including the lower castes. Thus, in a village of district Gorakhpur in UP, a Gandhi panchayat deposed the reigning high-caste and wealthy headman of the village, and many lower caste persons refused to offer services and goods to his family as it was perceived as anti-nationalist.

The Mahatma and his message were politically appropriated by the peasants who interpreted them in their various ways to fight against the landlords and the colonial state. The local press also contributed in building the image of the Mahatma and disseminating his supposed message. Rumours played an important role in the process of peasants' interpretation and appropriation of Gandhi's message. In the eyes of the peasants, Gandhi became the symbol which represented justice and freedom from oppression of the landlords, moneylenders and the colonial state. They justified their violent actions also in the name of Gandhi and his call to fight injustice.

25.5.2 Peasant Movements during the Non-cooperation

Due to the policies and actions of the colonial state and its protégé, the landlords, discontent was rising among the peasants. The effects of the World War further

exerted pressure on the Indian people in general. The rise in prices of various commodities, and problems faced in transport and shipping resulting in high prices of salt, cotton cloths and kerosene, unsettled the peasantry. The failure of monsoon in 1918 had disastrous consequences resulting in famine. Diseases of various kinds also made their appearance resulting in a large number of deaths. The poverty of the common peasant was increasing due to growing pressure on land in the absence of large urban employment opportunities. Arbitrary enhancement of rent, eviction from the land, forced labour, various other forms of landlord-imposed taxes, and coercion of several kinds created an explosive situation.

In UP, the situation was quite bad. The taluqdars were given enormous powers by the colonial state to make them allies. These big landlords practiced arbitrary eviction of tenants, levied illegal taxes, and charged very high rents. Some of the Home Rule members formed Kisan Sabhas in 1918 to organise the peasants. By 1919, there were about 450 branches in the province. A little later, the Congress also became active among UP peasants.

In the Awadh region, a powerful peasant movement developed under the leadership of Baba Ramachandra. This movement gained momentum when Ramachandra was arrested and the Congress leaders, particularly Jawaharlal Nehru, became involved. The rumour about Mahatma Gandhi's arrival to secure the release of Ramachandra brought tens of thousands of peasants on the streets. In this situation, the Non-cooperation movement provided the peasants an opportunity to voice their grievances and to link their movements with the nationalist mainstream. The nationalist struggle against the colonial rule also gave inspiration to peasants and their leaders in several regions to express their grievances more openly. However, some of the earlier leaders, such as Madan Mohan Malaviya, preferred to stick to the constitutional path. This led to the Congress and the non-cooperators establishing their own Oudh Kisan Sabha in 1920 which now affiliated more than 330 kisan sabhas. The peasants were asked not to offer *begaar* (unpaid labour) and refuse to cultivate those lands from which another tenant was evicted. The association of peasants' movement with the Congress gave rise to strong Kisan Sabha movement in many parts of the country since 1918. The peasants interpreted the Congress support in their own ways which quite often went against Congress' official position. For example, peasants' insistence on no-tax to the government and no-rent to the landlord, boycott of those persons who went against peasants' demands, and occasional violent acts to send their message across did not go well with the Congress higher leadership. In 1921, in some of UP districts, there were significant peasant agitations in which the crops of the landlords were burnt, the landlords' strongmen and the police were attacked, and some markets were looted. The Eka movement in Barabanki district, led by Madari Pasi, rattled the Congress by its violent ways. Such radical tendencies did not accord well with the official non-violent policies of the Congress leading to withdrawal of the Congress leaders.

The presence of the Congress leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru in UP, Ballabhbhai Patel in Gujarat and Rajendra Prasad in Bihar provided the peasants and their leaders much needed encouragement in their struggles. The peasants and their local leaders sought in the Congress an all-India organisation which would listen to their grievances and present their demands to the colonial authorities. On the other hand, the support received from the peasants provided the Congress much-

needed legitimacy to be a mass party which represented the Indians as a whole rather than the interests of the narrow upper and middle classes.

Gandhian nationalism also appealed to the tribal people in various ways. It ranged from violent protests (as in Gudem Hills of Andhra Pradesh led by Sitaram Raju and in Kumaun and Garhwal led by Badridutt Pande) to conscious change in their lifestyle to embrace vegetarianism and teetotalism. The uprising led by Sitarama Raju continued till 1924 against forest laws and moneylenders. In Rajasthan, the anti-feudal peasant movements were very active during the 1920s. Motilal Tejawat and others led the Bhil movement against forced labour and illegal cesses. The trend everywhere was to link the local movement to the nationalist one, whether the Congress leadership supported the particular movements or not. As Shahid Amin and other historians have argued, the peasants tended to interpret the Gandhian messages in their own ways which might not be in accordance with the official Congress policies.

Many middle and upper level Congress leaders adopted the strategy of harnessing the peasants' mobilisation to the nationalist cause without letting these agitations move into militant channels. In Awadh, the militant peasant movement led by Baba Ramchandra during 1918-20 was sought to be moderated and controlled by the Congress to the nationalist end without fully meeting the peasants' grievances. Similarly, in Bihar, the Congress leadership pursued the dual strategy of containing the militant peasant leaders like Swami Viswananda while bringing the peasants closer to the nationalist movement. In Kheda district in Gujarat, the peasant agitation was incorporated into the nationalist struggle. In Andhra Pradesh and Orissa also, the strong peasant movements were adopted by the Congress while keeping their militancy in check.

In some areas, such as in Gujarat and parts of Bengal, the Congress was able to control the peasant movements and channelise them in the desired direction in conformity with its own programme of the time. In some other areas, such as in parts of UP, the peasant movements turned militant. In such cases, the Congress did not further involve itself with them, which probably made it easy for the colonial authorities to suppress them. In Gorakhpur, when the peasant movement turned violent resulting in the looting of the market and killing of several policemen in Chauri-Chaura in 1922, Gandhi decided to withdraw the Non-cooperation movement.

In Bengal and Punjab, during the late 1920s, the Congress did not take up the demands of the predominantly Muslim peasants. Even in Bihar, the Congress vacillated in providing full support to the peasant agitations against landlords. In Malabar, a strong peasant movement developed in 1921 against the colonial state and the state-supported landlords. Initially, it received support from the Congress and Khilafat leaders. The movement did not remain non-violent and the peasants attacked the landlords and the government properties. The government repression resulted in hardening the religious ideology of the movement which now took communal overtones. The Congress withdrew from the movement and the massive state repression brutally crushed it resulting in large number of deaths and arrests.

However, in raiyatwari areas, the Congress more strongly took up the demands of the peasants against revenue enhancements. In Bardoli taluqa of Gujarat, the Congress leaders such as Vallabhbhai Patel and Kunvarji and Kalyanji Mehta

mobilised the peasants to resist the government demand of enhanced revenue in 1927. In coastal Andhra, the attempt by the colonial government to raise the revenue in 1927 met with stiff resistance from the peasants which developed into a strong movement led by Congress leaders.

25.5.3 Peasant Movements during the 1930s

The Civil Disobedience Movement witnessed even larger and more conscious peasant participation in nationalist movement. The politically surcharged atmosphere in the wake of the protests against Simon Commission was further intensified due to the impact of the World Depression by 1929. The peasants were getting agitated over the fall in prices of their products while they had to pay rents, revenue, taxes and debts at pre-Depression rates. The launch of the Civil Disobedience movement in such an atmosphere brought a very large number of peasants within the ambit of the nationalist movement. No-rent and no-revenue campaigns in various parts of the country were taken up by the peasant leaders. The emerging leftist trends in the Congress also influenced the growing peasant movements. A new generation of radical leadership emerged from among the Congress left wing and the communists who from now onwards would be closely attached to the peasant movements all over the country. Sahajanand, N.G. Ranga, Sohan Singh Josh, Indulal Yagnik, Jayaprakash Narayan, Mohanlal Gautam, Kamal Sarkar, Ahmed Din and many others became prominent in mobilisation of peasantry.

Powerful peasant movements developed in UP against eviction, enhancement of rent and forced labour in early 1930s. Gandhi advised the peasants to pay part of the rent and send their grievances to local Congress offices. The peasants interpreted the Gandhian message variously in their own ways and in many cases all payments to the landlords were stopped. Local leaders resorted to militant actions against landlords in the name of Congress. Cognisant of peasant distress in 1931, the Congress leadership authorised non-payment of rent in some UP districts. In 1936, the UP Congress leaders supported the call for abolition of landlordism.

In other parts of the country also, powerful peasant movements arose. In Bengal, Bankim Mukherji led the peasants of Burdwan against canal tax. In Orissa, strong peasant movements developed both in British India and princely states. In Punjab, very powerful and organised peasant movement emerged on various issues related to revenue, land settlement and illegal levies. In addition, defiance against colonialism by manufacturing salt on a large scale was also undertaken. Boycott against foreign goods and liquor was carried on as it was done in previous campaigns. The massive repression by the colonial state against the Congress leaders and the peasantry led to decline in the participation in many areas. At the same time, the smaller peasantry resorted to no-rent movements and in the tribal areas there were campaigns against forest laws. These movements tended to take a radical turn which the Congress wanted to avoid in search for a broader unity among Indians of all classes.

However, such unity was not easy to achieve as the landlords, propped up by the colonial government, pressurised the peasants to give in to their illegal exactions. In Bihar, Swami Sahajanand started a movement to protect the occupancy rights of the tenants, and formed Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in 1929. In the early 1930s, the Kisan Sabha, under the influence of the Socialists, took up radical

demands and organised a broad front of the peasantry. In Andhra, N.G. Ranga also mobilised the peasants and formed a Kisan Sabha. The Kisan Sabha movement spread to other regions of the country also and it raised the demand for the abolition of zamindari. In 1936, at the Lucknow session of the Congress, All India Kisan Sabha was formed with Sahajanand as its first president. It later issued a Kisan manifesto which demanded abolition of zamindari and occupancy rights for all tenants. Under pressure from its socialist members and leaders, the Congress adopted an Agrarian Programme in December 1936. The broad base created for the Congress by Kisan Sabha's mobilisation of the peasants led to its massive victory in the elections of 1937.

The formation of Congress ministries in several provinces in 1937 charged the peasants and their leaders with new energy and raised their expectations. The Congress ministries undertook certain measures to reduce the debt burdens by fixing interest rates in all provinces ruled by it, enhancements of rent were checked, many cultivators were given the status of occupancy tenants in UP, in Bihar *bakhast* lands were partly restored to tenants, in Maharashtra the *khoti* tenants of landholders were given some rights, and the grazing fees on the forest lands were abolished. However, there were several issues on which the Congress was seen by the peasant leaders as not paying attention to the peasants' grievances or even going back on its earlier commitment.

The Kisan Sabhas had initially aimed to create mutual understanding between the peasants and the landlords. However, owing to the adamant and oppressive attitude of the landlords, the Kisan Sabhas were forced to adopt militant posture. But they kept spreading nationalist ideology among the peasants in support of the Congress' political programme. But the right wing leaders in the Congress did not want the hegemony of the left and also endeavoured to check the peasant militancy. On the other hand, the peasants were expecting that the Congress ministries would meet their demands. Their movements in certain areas, such as in Bihar, was also intensified. But the Congress government in Bihar took a pro-landlord position which compelled the peasant leaders to launch a massive movement under the aegis of Bihar Kisan Sabha for the restoration of *bakasht* lands. The landlords felt threatened and appealed to the provincial government. Ultimately, the musclemen of the landlords and the state police suppressed the movement. The Bihar Congress now distanced itself from the Kisan Sabha and its militancy. Ultimately, certain concessions, compromises, and repression by the police and landlords resulted in decline of the movement.

In some other provinces also, the conservative stance of the Congress ministries was becoming clear and the radical peasant demands were sought to be checked, the interests of the landlords were protected, and the activities of the Kisan Sabha were curtailed. In the Haripura session of the Congress in February 1938, the Congress members were prohibited to become the members of Kisan Sabhas. The Congress leaders also did not intervene when the peasant movements faced severe repression in Princely States. [Bipan Chandra et al 1988: 197-209 and 343-50; Sumit Sarkar 1983: 239-42, 274-78, 315-6; S. Bandyopadhyay 2004: 407-10].

25.5.4 Nationalism and Peasantry during the 1940s

The Quit India movement began under the condition of leadership vacuum. Almost the entire top leadership of the Congress was arrested, and even other

leaders were forced to go underground. Local leaders sprang up who spurred the peasants to attack the government property such as police stations, treasury buildings, railway stations, post offices and electric installations. Europeans were attacked and sometimes killed in public. All sections of peasants, cutting across caste lines, and even many landlords supported the movement believing that the British rule was at an end. Peasants and agricultural workers participated in destroying the symbols of colonial authority in villages and established their own raj. In Bihar, UP, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat and several other parts of the country the peasants rose along with workers and middle classes against the colonial rule. The student volunteers played an important role in organising the movements and leading the attacks. In some parts of the country, as in Ballia district of UP and parts of Orissa and Maharastra, independence from British rule was declared and new governments were set up for a few days.

Later in the 1940s, some of the peasant movements became very militant and radical. The communist-led Bengal Kisan Sabha prepared the ground for the widespread Tebhaga movement in 1946 which continued for about a year before being suppressed by the government and the landlords. In Hyderabad, a princely state, a long protracted peasant rebellion against the landlords and the Nizam was organised by the communists. The Telangana movement, as it was called, began in mid-1946. It covered about 3,000 villages and a population of about 30 lakhs. All classes of peasants participated in it and won many successes before it was put down by the Indian army. The movement was formally withdrawn in October 1951.

During the 1940s, the Congress accepted the idea of zamindari abolition on a larger level. In its election manifesto of 1946, it proposed that landlordism would be abolished after paying an equitable compensation to the landlords. The Zamindari Abolition Acts, in fact, provided generous compensations to the landlords and also allowed them enough time to dispose of their lands in the ways they desired. It is true that substantial tenants and rich peasants also benefited from abolition of landlordism. But the poor peasants and agricultural workers did not gain much from such measures.

25.6 PEASANTRY AND INDIAN NATIONALISM – AN ASSESSMENT

The peasant movements against colonial rule had existed since much before the emergence of the nationalist movement in the late nineteenth century. However, the rise of nationalism helped to re-define the peasant movements. The idea of nation spread by the nationalist movement played a big role in raising the consciousness of the peasantry and creating the basis for the formation of All-India Kisan Sabha. It made the peasantry realise that they had certain common interests at all-India level. It encouraged the localised peasant movements to assume national character and significance.

On the other hand, the peasant movements provided strength to the nationalist movement in its anti-imperialist struggles. The limited social base of the Congress in the early period compelled its leaders to seek broader support among the middle classes and the masses. Peasantry was one very important group which could be mobilised to bolster the nationalist cause. The peasants also had their own

grievances against the colonial regime as they were among the most exploited and oppressed groups in Indian society due to extractive colonial policies. To promote nationalist ideas among the peasants the nationalist leadership attempted to portray the peasantry as a cohesive group above the divisions of caste, class and religion. However, the thrust towards class antagonism against the landlords was sought to be checked, and the mobilisation was intended primarily for forging an all-class and all-India alliance against imperialism. The idea of a single cohesive group of peasantry was also useful in allowing the nationalist leadership to integrate small and ruined landlords with the broad notion of peasantry. Secondly, by regularly taking up the peasants' demands, the nationalists wished to integrate the peasantry into the nation. As a part of this strategy, the Congress was not much in favour of separate peasant organisations. The nationalist belief was that the primary contradiction of the peasants lay with imperialism and, therefore, they should direct their struggles against it.

However, in the name of all-class unity, the Congress did not even support the just struggles of the peasantry against high rents and unfair dues imposed by the landlords. The problem with the nationalist mobilisation of the peasantry lay in its avoidance of the struggle against landlords. Except in UP, the top nationalist leadership mobilised the peasants primarily around the anti-imperialist struggles on reducing the revenue demands of the state. So far as peasants' plight from the excessive rent demanded by the landlords and by the exploitative moneylenders was concerned, the apex nationalist leadership generally ignored or even opposed the peasant movements against such exploitation.

Yet, the Congress succeeded in mobilising the peasantry because it was not organically linked to the feudal elements. The Congress could accommodate radicalism such as anti-revenue and anti-rent propaganda within its ideological fold. The willingness of the Congress to support and voice the peasants' demands at various levels afforded them the opportunity to integrate the peasants into broader nationalist movement. The peasantry supported the nationalist cause because they thought that through it their basic problems related to land, rent / revenue, and debt would be solved. Quite often, therefore, the peasants interpreted and worked on the nationalist ideas in their own ways. The nationalist message was perceived by the peasants not just against the colonial rule but against all other forms of oppressors including the landlords, moneylenders, traders, and shopkeepers.

Most studies reveal that the social base of the Congress derived neither from the upper-caste landed aristocratic groups nor from the lower-caste poor peasants and agricultural labourers. It was mostly derived from the rich and middle peasantry. However, all sections of peasantry, in varying measures, participated in nationalist movements, although the participation of the upper layers of peasantry might have been greater.

Even when the peasant movement tended to go beyond the Congress programme, it used nationalist ideas and its aims and intents were expressed in nationalist idioms. Despite disagreements with the official Congress policies, the peasant leaders generally used nationalist rhetoric and names of the prominent Congress leaders to carry out their programmes. The Congress was also getting increasingly involved in peasant agitations to counter the colonial government and to extend its own hegemony over this crucial and most numerous segment of Indian society.

It is doubtful whether the intricacies of the Congress' anti-imperialist programme was imbibed by the peasants or whether the meanings of anti-imperialist pan-Indian nationalism deeply seeped into the consciousness of the peasantry. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that the peasants were aware of the broad direction of Congress movement and used the nationalist symbols and the names of the leaders in the course of their agitations. They also internalised many of the nationalist ideas coming to them either from the Congress or other nationalists and revolutionaries.

25.7 SUMMARY

The peasant resistance to colonial intervention began right from the initial period of the colonial rule. For about a century or even longer, the peasant protests and resistance against colonialism and its allies such as the landlords and moneylenders were led by traditional leadership which were in many ways closely associated with the peasants. In the late nineteenth century, some middle-class, modern educated persons took up the cause of the peasants and tribals and voiced their demands. However, middle-class leadership reached the peasants only in the second decade of the twentieth century. Gandhi was the most important nationalist leader who seriously attempted and succeeded in drawing the peasants into nationalist fold. In his wake, many Congress leaders became involved in peasant movements. However, the Congress tried to restrain the class-antagonism inherent in these movements against the landlords. The main objective of the Congress was to direct peasant movements against imperialism. In this quest, many just demands of the peasants were not taken up or ignored. Thus, although the Congress in particular, and the nationalist movement in general, played the crucial role of imbuing the peasant movements with modern consciousness and in expanding the scope and visibility of even smaller struggles, the Congress did not at times press for those peasants' issues which it had taken up itself.

25.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the views of various historians regarding the relationship between nationalism and peasantry.

2) Describe the initial process through which a close association between peasant movements and nationalist movement began.

3) Discuss the association of nationalism with the peasant movements in UP and Bihar during the 1920s and 1930s.

4) What was the nationalist strategy with regard to the peasant movements?

UNIT 26 THE WORKING CLASS*

Structure

26.1 Introduction

26.2 Growth and Conditions of Modern Working Class

26.3 Nationalists and the Workers in the Early Phase

26.4 Nationalists and Working Class in the Era of Mass Nationalism

- 26.4.1 Working Class Movements from 1918 to 1926
- 26.4.2 Working Class and Nationalist Movement between 1927 and 1937
- 26.4.3 Working Class and Nationalism from 1937 to 1947

26.5 Summary

26.6 Exercises

26.1 INTRODUCTION

The rise of modern industry resulted in the formation of collectivities of workers in certain cities. In some big urban centres (such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Kanpur, Ahmedabad, and Jamshedpur), their presence was overwhelming. Any political party trying to build its base would attempt to mobilise them. Nationalism was the most important ideology and sentiment spreading throughout India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The workers were also not untouched by it. However, the relationship between the workers and the nationalists, particularly represented by the Congress, was not always close and uniform. It is the nature and dynamic of this association that we will discuss in this Unit.

26.2 GROWTH AND CONDITIONS OF MODERN WORKING CLASS

The growth of plantations, coal-mining, railways and mill industries in the nineteenth century resulted in the rise of the modern working class. It was a modern working class in the sense of relatively modern organisation of labour and a relatively free market for labour. There were certain important exceptions to this rule. The plantation workers, who also worked for the capitalist employers and produced goods which were sold in the international markets, were recruited and worked under unfree conditions. In fact, for the majority of the workers in colonial India, the recruitment and working conditions were not as free as were present in some other countries which were capitalistically more developed. This situation had its impact on the working class movement as it developed over the years.

Plantations and railways were the initial enterprises to herald the era of colonial capitalism in Indian subcontinent. A British company, the Assam Tea Company, was established in 1839 to set up tea gardens in Assam. Coffee plantations were started in South India by 1840. The Great Indian Peninsular Railways laid its first line between Bombay and Thane in 1853. Another line was opened by the

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Eastern Indian Railway between Calcutta and Raniganj in 1854. By 1857, there was 288 miles of railway tracks in India. The real expansion occurred after the Revolt of 1857 when the British rulers realised its significance for military purposes. Coal production had begun as far back as 1775. The Bengal Coal Company was established in 1843. However, it was only the beginning of railways which saw a real growth in its production because coal was essential for running the railway locomotion. By the end of 19th century, its production rose to around three million tons.

The first cotton mill was built in Bombay in 1854 by a Parsi businessman and it started production in 1856. Cotton mill industry developed rapidly in cities like Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Sholapur and Nagpur. It was mostly owned by the Indians. In contrast, the jute mills remained in foreign hands for a long time. A Scottish entrepreneur started the first jute mill in Kolkata in 1854. It also expanded rapidly over the next fifty years. The mill industry got enormously strengthened by the 1870s with a large number of workers employed in them. In 1890, over 3 lakh workers were employed in factories and mines.

By 1914, there were 264 cotton mills in India employing 260,000 workers, 60 jute mills with 200,000 workers, the railways provided work to 600,000 people, the plantations to 700,000 workers and mines to 150,000 workers. An increasingly growing number of workers were concentrated in small enclaves within city boundaries or around plantations. By 1921, over 28 lakhs persons were employed in organised industries. Besides, a large number of people were employed in the non-organised sector in urban areas, for example, domestic servants, and casual workers in the market. The modern working class, although derived from the agricultural labourers and marginal peasants in the countryside, was quite different its position. It was numerically small compared to the overwhelming number of labouring poor and small peasants in the rural areas. But it was concentrated in certain crucial areas from where the emergent modern politics could be influenced.

The working and living conditions of the workers were extremely bad. Long hours of work, low wages, unhygienic conditions at working places, employment of small children, discrimination against women workers, poor and unsanitary housing, high levels of indebtedness, and no guarantee against accident, sickness or old age created a situation in which the death rate was very high among workers leading to a high rate of turnover. In most places, the workers had to labour for 12 to 16 hours or even more under intolerable conditions. They had then to live in houses in the cities which had an average of 5 persons in one small room. Women workers faced even harsher situation labouring both in the mills, plantations or collieries and also working at home under unbearable conditions. The conditions of the plantation labourers were particularly bad because they were confined in a restricted area and were legally bound to work for the period of the contract. They almost faced the situation of prisoners of the planters who employed recruiting and disciplining agents called *sirdars* and security guards to supervise and coerce them to work.

The government passed Factory Acts in 1881 and 1891. However, these applied only to children and women and not to the adult male labourers who formed the bulk of the workforce, and, even in their cases, the protection was not comprehensive. The machinery to enforce the provisions of the Acts was even weaker. The provisions of these Acts were flouted without much fear of penalty.

The Factory Act of 1911 restricted the working hours of adult males to 12 hours on any one working day. The amended Factory Act of 1922 further reduced the working time to 11 hours.

The situation on the wage front was no better in the initial years. The industrial wages were not much above the agricultural wages on the whole. The rates were different in different centres. While in Bombay the wages were the highest, in Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Nagpur and other centres they were low. In the plantations the wages were even lower. However, even in Bombay, the wages remained at subsistence level till around 1918. Between 1918 and 1921, the wages in Bombay, as in other centres, registered considerable increase, even in real terms. This was the result of the agitations by the workers as well as the beginning of trade unions among them. The situation slowly improved in the long run both in regard to the security of jobs and rise in wages. However, the picture was not so good for the smaller and less organised and unorganised industries. There the wages remained much lower and there was no security of jobs either.

26.3 NATIONALISTS AND THE WORKERS IN THE EARLY PHASE

During the early period, some social reformers showed interests in the improvement of workers' conditions. Sasipada Banerjee, a Brahmo social reformer, formed an organisation, the Workingmen's Club, in 1870 to work for the amelioration of the conditions of workers in Bengal. He also brought out a monthly journal entitled *Bharat Sramjeebi* for spreading education among workers. In Mumbai, S.S. Bengalee and N.M. Lokhanday were involved in various activities among the workers. Lokhanday, an associate of the great social reformer, Jotiba Phule, published an Anglo-Marathi weekly, *Dinbandhu*, since 1880. He also formed the Bombay Millhands' Association in 1890. Some other important organizations active among the Bombay workers were the Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha formed in 1909, and the Social Service League established in 1911. However, these bodies were primarily interested in welfare activities and did not have much organizational base among the workers. Their work was mostly of a philanthropic nature, and not much political. Their main aim was to persuade the colonial government to make legislation to improve the harsh working conditions of labourers.

So far as the nationalists were concerned, they were so much enamoured by the ideology of industrialism that they regarded any legislative intervention for ameliorating the appalling conditions of workers as unnecessary and uncalled-for. None of the major works by early nationalists showed concern for the misery of the labouring classes, as they did for the peasantry. The Indian National Congress also did not mention the industrial workers in its early resolutions. When the first Factory Commission was appointed in 1875 to enquire into the conditions of the factory workers in Bombay, the nationalist opinion was not in favour of any legal intervention on this issue. Even when the Factory Act of 1881 was passed, which did not go far in addressing the terrible conditions of work, the nationalists were against it. The *Amrit Bazar Patrika* clearly expressed the nationalist sentiment on this issue by writing that 'A larger death rate amongst our operatives is far more preferable to the collapse of this rising industry' [cited in S.B. Upadhyay 2004: 146]. Dadabhai Naoroji declared in the second session

of the Indian National Congress that the Congress 'must confine itself to questions in which the entire nation has a direct participation, and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to class Congresses' [cited in Bipan Chandra et al : 211]. Thus, the nationalist leadership in pre-1905 phase displayed strong reservation towards any legislative measures by the colonial government, and by and large remained indifferent to the conditions of the workers.

One major reason for such reaction of the nationalists was because the British cotton textile industry was seen to be behind the move to regulate the hours of work in Indian industries which were perceived by it as competitor. The nationalist press, therefore, bitterly criticised any attempt to restrict the working hours in Indian industries. The fact that extremely long working hours were neither in the interest of Indian industries nor of the workers was overlooked by the nationalists. Even when the workers protested against such long working hours, the nationalist opinion dubbed it as the result of outside interference rather than any genuine grievance of the workers. One of the nationalist papers, *Kalpataru*, summarised the prevailing opinion of the nationalists when it wrote in September 1905: 'We have to build a nation and it matters not if all the mill hands are placed at the altar of martyrdom' [cited in S.B. Upadhyay 2004: 149].

Such nationalist reaction was prompted by the nationalist fear that the fledgling Indian industries would be destroyed due to any interference by the colonial government which worked in the interests of the British cotton manufacturers. On the other hand, when the workers' protests were against the colonial state, the nationalists, particularly of the extremist stream, promptly supported them. They made a very clear distinction between the grievances of the workers employed in the industries owned by Europeans and Indians. For example, the nationalists quickly extended support to the strike by the signallers of the GIP Railway in 1899 and appealed to the public to raise funds for the strikers. Similarly, they expressed sympathy for the mint workers who were worked for long hours and whose conditions were very bad. They also supported the strikes of the postal employees and some nationalists demanded that unions should be formed among these workers.

Thus, the pattern of early nationalist response to the workers' grievances and protests was very clear. If the protests were against the Indian industrialists, the nationalists did not support them, and wanted the matters to be resolved internally without government intervention. However, if the protests were against the colonial government, many nationalists supported the workers. The nationalists wanted to enlist the support of the workers for the nationalist cause but not at the cost of the supposed interests of Indian capitalists. The early nationalists quite clearly sought indigenous bourgeois development for the country and opposed any move which they perceived to be against this.

But, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the nationalists of extremist variety began to see the workers as an ally in the quest for national freedom. Thus, during the Swadeshi Movement, the nationalists reached out to the workers, particularly in Bengal, and were involved in various protests and strikes by the workers, especially in foreign-owned companies. Government of India Press, railways and jute industry were the main concerns in which the nationalists supported and organised workers' protests. The workers as a collectivity were

sought to be involved in political matters and nationalist mobilisations. Right on the first day of protests against the partition of Bengal in 1905, the workers struck work and joined the demonstrations.

Nationalists such as G.S. Agarkar, B.C. Pal, C.R. Das and G. Subramania Iyer spoke for pro-labour reforms. In 1903, Iyer emphasised the need for the workers to form their own organisations to fight for their demands. Other Swadeshi leaders in Bengal, such as Aswini Coomar Banerji, S. Haldar, Premtosh Bose and Apurba Kumar Ghosh, were involved in several protests and strikes of the workers, particularly in foreign-owned companies. In Punjab, Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh were actively involved in the strikes by workers in government concerns in 1907. They were deported by the colonial government for this. In Tamil Nadu, the nationalist leaders, such as Subramaniya Siva and Chidambaram Pillai, organised strikes in foreign-owned cotton mills. The workers were sought to be involved in nationalist agitations as well. The *hartals* to protest the partition of Bengal witnessed many strikes and participation of workers in demonstrations. During the Swadeshi movement, some preliminary efforts were made to form trade unions. Some temporary organisations of workers were formed. But, due to lack of consistency, long-term organisations could not develop and, after the decline of the Swadeshi Movement, the labour unions floated during the height of the movement disappeared.

The greatest demonstration of the workers' nationalist fervour was seen in 1908 when there were massive strikes and protests against Tilak's imprisonment. The workers from the mills and other industries violently protested against the government for unfairly imprisoning Tilak when he wrote articles in defence of the revolutionaries such as Khudiram Bose and others. As Tilak was sentenced for six years, the millworkers decided to strike work and hold demonstrations for six days, one day for each year. The strike was almost total bringing out thousands of workers on the streets, despite the fact that there were no noticeable leaders managing the strikes and demonstrations. These events in Bombay in 1908 were a high watermark of the relationship between the nationalists and the workers.

26.4 NATIONALISTS AND WORKING CLASS IN THE ERA OF MASS NATIONALISM

The graph of working class movements all over India cannot be neatly drawn in terms of periods. Nevertheless, for the sake of presentation, we have here adopted a period-wise structure for working class activities and their relationship to nationalist movement.

26.4.1 Working Class Movements from 1918 to 1926

The First World War caused steep rise in the prices of necessary commodities while the wages did not rise much. The real earnings of the workers, therefore, registered a sharp decline causing tremendous hardship to them. The news from the War front and the relatively better situation of workers in Western countries, combined with the Russian Revolution, instilled a new consciousness among the workers. The era of mass nationalism, enunciated by Gandhi in India, was the most important factor in the post-War scenario. Various middle-class leaders, including the nationalist ones, were now taking increased interests in workers'

problems. Earlier protest activities by the workers had also made them aware of their strengths and weaknesses and made them conscious of the need for larger organisation. Thus, economic distress, beginning of the era of mass nationalist politics, Russian Revolution, and formation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) created the situation for greater politicisation of labour and formation of labour organisations. All these factors heralded the era of general industrial strikes and of trade unionism. The strikes which were resorted to since 1918 were much larger, more intense, and better organised. The years from 1918 to 1922 were very important for labour movement. There were a large number of strikes and protests all over the country, the workers became involved with the nationalist upsurge during this period, and various unions all over the country were formed leading to an all-India federation, AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress).

The Madras Labour Union, formed in April 1918, is generally considered to be the first trade union in India. B.P.Wadia, a nationalist leader and an associate of Annie Besant, was instrumental in its organisation. It was mainly an organisation based on the workers of Carnatic and Buckingham Mills in Madras. But workers from other trades such as tramways, rickshaw-pullers, etc. also joined the union in the initial stage. For the first time in India, there was a regular membership and the members were to contribute one *anna* as monthly subscription.

Around the same time, labour agitation had started in Ahmedabad which was to lead towards a completely different model of labour organisation. The workers in Ahmedabad were agitating for a bonus to compensate for the rise in prices. Ansuyaben Sarabhai, who was involved with the agitation, got in touch with Gandhiji and requested him to come to Ahmedabad. Gandhiji stood by the workers' side and demanded that the workers should be given 35 per cent bonus. On the refusal of the millowners, he called for a strike and insisted that the principle of arbitration should be accepted. He also went on a fast to persuade the millowners. Finally, the millowners accepted arbitration and as a compromise, the arbitrator recommended 27.5 per cent increase in wages. On the basis of this struggle and on the Gandhian principles of conciliation and arbitration, the Textile Labour Association, also known as Majur Mahajan, was established in Ahmedabad in 1920.

The atmosphere of mass politics created by the Khilafat Movement, anti-Rowlatt agitations, and the Non-cooperation Movement had influenced the workers who demonstrated their collective strength in many industries across the country. The millworkers in Bombay effected general industrial strikes in 1919 and 1920 involving over a lakh of workers. On several occasions, the workers in various parts of the country struck to protest government repression of nationalist movement. In April 1919, after government repression in Punjab and Gandhi's arrest, workers in Gujarat, Bengal and Maharashtra struck work, and held violent demonstrations. In 1919, the rumour of Gandhi's arrest brought a large number of Bombay workers on the streets which also witnessed some violence. In 1920, the Bombay millworkers twice struck work and held demonstrations after the death of Tilak to pay obeisance to him. In November 1921, there occurred a large-scale strike in Bombay mills in support of Congress' call to boycott the visit of Prince of Wales. More than a lakh of workers participated in militant demonstrations all over the city.

In its Amritsar Session, held in 1919 in the wake of rising unrest among workers, the Congress passed a resolution directing its provincial committees and other associated bodies to work for promoting labour unions throughout the country. These labour unions would try to secure fair wages and good living conditions for the workers. Again in 1920, in its Nagpur Session, the Congress passed a resolution: 'This Congress expresses its fullest sympathy with the workers in India in their struggle for securing their legitimate rights through the organization of trade unions, and places on record its condemnation of the brutal policy of treating the lives of Indian workers as of no account under the false pretext of preserving law and order. The Congress is of the opinion that Indian labour should be organized with a view to improve and promote their well-being and secure to them just rights and also to prevent exploitation i) of Indian Labour, ii) of Indian resources by foreign agencies' [cited in S. Sen 1977: 221-2]. As is evident, the resolution basically underlined the exploitation of the workers by foreign companies and the repression by the colonial state. No clear stand was taken about the exploitation and maltreatment of labour by Indian industrialists.

The launch of the Non-cooperation Movement helped in various ways to energise the labour movements all over country. It inspired the workers and their leaders to struggle for their just rights, and several nationalist activists directly participated and led the labour agitations in various parts of the country. There were hundreds of strikes all over India in many enterprises during 1918-21, including some general industrial strikes. In Bombay Presidency, there were numerous strikes pointing to a general unrest among workers to improve their conditions. In Bengal, the Khilafat agitators and some Gandhians supported and participated in many strikes and agitations by jute workers in and around Calcutta. The Khilafat activists and the Non-cooperators held a lot of meetings in Calcutta and preached Hindu-Muslim amity, setting up of arbitration courts, abandoning liquor and toddy, and boycott of law courts and foreign goods. Even unorganised workers such as carters, tramway workers and taxi-drivers were involved in their own struggles. The wave of struggle extended to coal workers and also to the tea garden workers in Darjeeling and Dooars. There were 137 strikes in Bengal between July 1920 and March 1921. In Raniganj coalfields, Swami Viswananda and Darsanananda, deputed by the Congress, organised and mobilised the workers against European Managing Agencies which were in control. They formed two labour associations in this area, and they preached equality of all humans and the need to improve the conditions of the workers. They also led an important strike in East India Railways which continued for about three months. Even in the tea gardens, Non-cooperation Movement inspired the belief that the British rule was to end soon resulting in the demise of the hated garden managers. Several sporadic agitations took place, with some help from the Congressmen. C.R. Das was an active Congress leader in Bengal who worked for linking the Congress with the emergent labour movement and wanted that the Congress should actively involve itself with promoting labour struggles against capitalists. Some Congress leaders, however, had misgivings about this strategy and wanted only a restricted involvement of the Congress in labour issues so as not to alienate the Indian industrialists. In Jamshedpur, the Jamshedpur Labour Association, was formed during the 1920 strike by the Congress leaders. In 1925, the renowned Congress leader, C.F. Andrews, became its president. Gandhi also visited the place and exhorted both the employers and the workers to work according to the principle of harmonious relation between labour and capital.

The heightened political activities during this period resulted in formation of several unions in many centres. By 1920, according to an estimate there were 125 unions consisting of 250,000 members. This was a fairly impressive growth by any standards. All these developments led to the establishment of the AITUC in 1920, with Lala Lajpat Rai, the Congress President of that year, as its first president and Dewan Chaman Lall as its first general secretary. Tilak, before his death in August 1920, was the moving spirit behind the formation of the AITUC. Many people connected with labour were realising that there was a need for a central organisation of labour to coordinate the works of the trade unions all over India. The formation of the ILO acted as a catalyst for it. The ILO was established in 1919 according to the terms set by the Versailles Treaty which ended the World War I. It was felt that there should be a national organisation of the trade unions whose nominees could be chosen to represent the Indian labour in the ILO.

The emphasis of the AITUC was to associate the workers with the nationalist movement. A large number of Congress activists were among the 800 delegates who attended the AITUC conference from all over the country. 60 unions had affiliated with it and 42 more had sent their willingness to affiliate. By all counts, the formation of the AITUC was a success. Overall, the AITUC claimed to represent over 500,000 workers from all over the country.

Lajpat Rai, in his first presidential address to the AITUC, emphasised the urgent need for organisation among workers, and declared that 'We must organize our workers, make them class conscious.' He warned the capitalists that if the 'capital wants to ignore the needs of labour and can think only of its huge profits, it should expect no response from labour and no sympathy from the general public' [cited in S. Sen 1977: 171]. He linked capitalism with imperialism and militarism and emphasised that the organised labour was very significant in the fight against them. Dewan Chaman Lall moved a resolution in favour of *Swaraj* and emphasised that it would be a *Swaraj* for the workers as well. All important leaders of the Indian National Congress, except Gandhiji, were enthused by the formation of the AITUC and send congratulatory messages for its conferences in 1920 and 1921.

The Congress' interest in labour declined after the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation Movement. The labour movements also registered a decline in this period due to various reasons. The years between 1922 and 1926 were a time of industrial recession and the workers were at a receiving end. The industrialist sought to cut wages which the workers now found difficult to resist. Although a few important strikes, particularly in Bombay, took place, the overall scenario pointed towards a retreat of working class activism as the job market was shrinking. The number of strikes declined from 376 in 1921 to about 130 annually between 1924 and 1927. Between 1923 and 1930, the Congress passed just one resolution on labour issues in 1926 in which it wanted the Gandhian constructive programme to be extended to the workers in urban areas.

Gandhi had different ideas about capital-labour relationship. He considered the capitalists as trustees and the workers as partners, both working for common public good. He believed in amicable and mutual settlement of all contentious issues and strongly discouraged class conflict. The role of trade unions, according to him, was not just to agitate for wages and other workers' issues by holding

strikes. They should rather work for the social and cultural improvements of workers and their families. His idea of constructive work among the labourers included establishment of day school for children, enforcement of prohibition, educating the workers for proper and ethical behaviour, and so on. He warned that 'It will be the most serious mistake to make use of labour strikes for political purposes' [cited in V. Bahl 1988: 6]. He firmly believed that 'Labour must not become a pawn in the hands of politicians on the political chessboard'. He chastised the Bengal Congress leaders in 1921 for supporting labour militancy by stating that 'We seek not to destroy capital of capitalists but to regulate the relations between capital and labour' [cited in S. Bandyopadhyay 2004: 378]. All disputes should be settled through mutual understanding and arbitration. There should be no role of strikes in labour-employer relationship. Such views were not in conformity with the practice of trade unions. Thus, the TLA, under instructions from Gandhi, did not affiliate with the AITUC when the latter was formed. Gandhi did not even send a message to the first conference of the AITUC. He did not approve the idea of a central organisation of the working class which encompassed various unions.

26.4.2 Working Class and Nationalist Movement between 1927 and 1937

Although some of the Congress leaders had been involved with the labour movements in several places and had been active in certain unions, their main interest of the Congress had been towards overall national movement. Although the labour had been deeply influenced by the nationalist movement in general, the inconsistent involvement of the Congress in their economic struggles had created the space for others with different ideologies. In the late 1920s, the leadership of organised labour was moving towards the communists who were energetically organising and mobilising the workers to raise their voice for their just demands. After 1926, the communists had started making an impact in the labour movement in some centres, particularly Bombay. Workers' and Peasants' Parties were organised in several parts of the country under the leadership of S.A. Dange, P.C. Joshi, Muzaffar Ahmed and Sohan Singh Josh. In the re-energised nationalist atmosphere, the communists quickly spread their influence among workers and became the leading force in labour unions in Bombay and Calcutta. Their leadership of the legendary 1928 cotton textile strike in Bombay and 1929 jute textile strike in Calcutta made them into the most important player in labour movement. The 1928 strike propelled the communist-led Girni Kamgar Union to become one of the most important unions. Its membership increased from 324 to 54,000. In many other industries located in various parts of the country, the communist influence quickly spread among workers. With their worker-oriented ideology and hard work, the communists made a strong impact among labour unions. By the end of 1928, the communists and other leftist forces had acquired an upper hand in the AITUC.

The national scene had again become charged up in 1928 due to agitation against the all-White Simon Commission. Angry demonstrations were held all over the country to protest the exclusion of Indians from deciding their own constitution. In line with the Indian National Congress, the AITUC resolved in 1927 to boycott the Simon Commission and the workers enthusiastically participated in demonstrations against the Commission. The unprecedented depression in the world economy in 1929 resulted in recession in Indian industries as well. Lowering

of wages and large-scale retrenchment was resorted to by the industrialists to economise. Schemes of rationalisation were set in motion which increased the intensity of work without raising the wages. Strikes took place at various places against these measures. The workers at several places also held strikes and militant demonstrations during the Civil Disobedience Movement. There were many strikes on economic as well as political issues all over the country between 1927 and 1931.

This period witnessed the legendary strikes by the Bombay textile workers in 1928 which lasted for about six months. The general industrial strike in textile industry of Bombay was repeated in 1929 which, however, failed. There was also a protracted strike of workers in Tata Iron and Steel Works in Jamshedpur. In 1929, there was a general strike among the jute workers of Calcutta. The militancy exhibited by workers was partly due to the rise of the communists in the workers' organisations. In 1931, the workers of Sholapur staged militant strike. The workers in Bombay and Calcutta also struck work. In 1932, significant strikes occurred in the railway workshops in Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies. In 1934, a big strike occurred in textile mills in Bombay. Many of these strikes now happened under communist leadership with the Congress not playing an important role in these, although the presence of nationalist sentiments cannot be discounted.

During this period, the tussle within the AITUC between the liberal-reformist leadership and the leftist-communists got bitter in the wake of long-drawn strikes at certain centres and power struggle within the organisation. There was also deep disagreement between the two sides about international affiliation of the AITUC. While the communists wanted to affiliate it to the Red International Labour Union, the other group wanted to associate with the International Federation of Trade Unions. At the 8th session of the AITUC in 1929, the organisational split came. While the AITUC remained with the communist leadership with help from the left nationalists such as Nehru and Bose, the other group formed the Indian Trade Union Federation.

Within the AITUC, the conflict of politics still persisted between the left-nationalists with allegiance to the Congress and the communists. The fateful decision of the communists to keep away from the Congress in 1928 proved costly for them. The government, sensing their isolation, clamped hard and arrested the major communist leaders to be tried under Meerut Conspiracy Case. After the failed strike of Bombay textile workers in 1929, the membership of the Girni Kamgar Union declined precipitously to 800. The second split occurred in 1931, when the communists moved out to form the Red Trade Union Congress. In 1935, with the change in the policy of the Communist International which now wanted the communists all over the world to follow the 'United Front' strategy and work jointly with bourgeois liberals and socialists against the rising tide of fascism, the communist-controlled Red Trade Union Congress joined the AITUC, which was at that point controlled by the supporters of M.N. Roy.

Some Congress leaders, such as Subhas Bose, wanted that the Congress should take more interest in labour issues and support the workers in their just struggles against both the foreign and Indian capitalists. Nehru declared in 1929 that 'if we spread socialist ideas we are bound to come into conflict with the capitalists. But this should not deter us from working for the welfare of the peasants and

workers' [cited in V. Bahl 1988: 9]. However, although local Congress leaders and activists were supportive of and involved in labour agitations, the central leadership did not do much to actively associate the Congress with the workers' struggles. Even Nehru, as the president of the AITUC in 1929, reminded the delegates that the Congress was 'not a labour organisation', but 'a large body comprising all manner of people' [cited in S. Bandyopadhyay 2004: 378]. The imperative to lead the national movement comprising all kinds of people in basically non-violent way did not permit the Congress to closely identify with any single class or group. The growing influence of the communists also alarmed the Congress leadership and determined its guarded approach to labour.

However, in 1931, the Congress, in its Karachi Session, passed a resolution which promised that the Congress government, after independence, would provide the workers a proper wage, healthy working conditions, protection for old age and sickness. It would restrict the number of hours, provide maternity leave for women, grant the right to form labour unions, and seek to improve overall condition of labour. In the wake of its decision to participate in elections, the Congress Working Committee constituted a Labour Committee in 1936 to help the workers in their problems and struggles. The Congress manifesto also supported union-formation among the workers.

On the whole, due to its national commitment, its paradigm of a bourgeois economic development, its policy of class conciliation rather than class conflict, and the Gandhian ideology of non-violence which was often superseded in working class struggles, the Congress had not been much involved organisationally in the labour movement until quite late. However, the nationalist movement worked as a great inspiration in energising the workers to struggle tenaciously for their rights.

26.4.3 Working Class and Nationalism from 1937 to 1947

The formation of Congress ministries in various provinces in 1937 resulted in increased working-class activities. In 1935, the communists, again on instructions and changed line from the Comintern, decided to join hands with the Congress. The AITUC supported the Congress candidates during 1937 elections. Increased civil liberties and pro-labour attitude of some important Congress leaders provided a favourable ground for labour movement during the period of the Congress ministries.

The number of trade unions registered a significant increase from 271 in 1936-37 to 562 in 1938-39, and their membership rose from 261,047 to 399,159 in those years. The moderate National Federation of Trade Unions came together with the AITUC on the same platform in 1938. There were a few notable strikes in this period. The general strike of the jute workers in Bengal in 1937 lasted for 74 day involving 225,000 workers. It was supported by the Congress which passed a resolution condemning the repression by the state. In Bombay, a big strike in textile industry occurred in 1938 against the Industrial Disputes Bill introduced by the Congress ministry in the province. Besides these, there were several important strikes in Kanpur, Madras and many other centres. In Jamshedpur, the Congressmen had been active in labour organisations right since 1920 strike. However, as this industry was under the premier Indian industrialists, the Tatas, they remained a little careful in order not to hurt the Indian industry.

They mostly tried mediation which would be acceptable to both sides. But, in the 1930s and 1940s, the Congressman Abdul Bari turned out to be a firebrand labour leader. He became very popular among the workers owing to his militant position and anti-capitalist speeches.

In 1938, the strike wave reached a very high level, particularly on the issue of the recognition of unions by the management, which frightened the industrialists. On the labour issue, the Congress was divided between the right wing (which did not want mass agitations and did not wish to involve workers in organised form in the Congress) and the left wing which favoured the involvement of the Congress in mass politics and taking up the demands of the workers. However, in 1937, even Nehru advised the workers in Kanpur that they should not do anything which might cause obstruction in the smooth working of the mills, as this would ultimately mean a loss for the workers as well. To restrict the labour militancy, the Congress ministry in Bombay passed the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act in 1939. For the recognition of a union, it made the clause of arbitration necessary. Strikes could be legal only if a proper notice had been given and the arbitration process was over.

In the beginning of the War, the Congress ministries resigned to protest the unilateral decision by the colonial government to involve India in War. The communists were also opposed to what they termed as imperialist war. The workers of Bombay staged anti-War strikes and demonstrations. Over 90,000 workers participated in the strike. During the ensuing Quit India Movement, the nationalist activists tried to involve the organised workers all over the country and succeeded to a large extent. In Ahmedabad, Jamshedpur, and some other places, there were militant strikes by the workers. In Tata Iron and Steel Plant workers struck for two weeks demanding the formation of national government. In Ahmedabad, the textile workers' strike continued for over three months. In other places also, such as in Kanpur, Bombay, Delhi, Nagpur, Madras and Bangalore, there were strikes and demonstrations by workers in support of the nationalists. However, during the War period, the Congress could not undertake any organised activity among the workers, although individual Congress persons were involved in union activities and the Gandhians in constructive work.

In 1945, large number of workers in various places held strikes and demonstrations in support of the INA prisoners. In 1946, the workers in Bombay turned violent in support of the revolt by RIN ratings. Led by left unions, between two and three lakh workers struck work and held militant demonstrations. They fought with the police and the military leading to the death of 250 agitators, including the millworkers.

In the post-War period, when the contours of a national government were becoming apparent, the political rivalry within the trade unions became even more acute. After its victory in several provinces in 1946 elections, the Congress Working Committee decided in 1946 that the Congressmen should further involve themselves in labour matters but they should 'discriminate between occasions on which labour action deserves their support and those which called for restraints and discussions' [cited in N. Basu 2008: 26]. To propagate its viewpoint among the workers and to organise them on that basis, the Congress had earlier formed Congress Majdoor Sevak Sangh and Hindustan Majdoor Sevak Sangh. Later, it was able to mobilize a large number of trade unions and in May 1947, the Indian

National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was formed. It had 200 unions with a membership of about six lakhs. In 1948, the unions under the influence of the Congress Socialists came out of the AITUC and formed the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat (HMP). In 1949, another organisation called United Trade Union Congress was formed under the famous trade union leader, Mrinal Kanti Bose. In 1949, the HMP and the IFL united to found the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS). Thus, in 1949, there were four central trade union federations – the AITUC, the INTUC, the HMS and the UTUC.

26.5 SUMMARY

The organised working class was a very small proportion of the Indian population during colonial times. Yet, its concentration in certain important cities gave it cohesion and political visibility. The nationalists in the early period were not much interested in the issues of the workers. Since they favoured an indigenous capitalist path of development, they even opposed legislation to regulate the working conditions in mills and factories. However, in the beginning of the twentieth century, the nationalists belonging to the extremist wing realised the political importance of the workers and sought to mobilise them for the nationalist cause. In the period of mass nationalism, enunciated by Gandhi, the workers' participation in the nationalist activities became more frequent. However, the generalised, multi-class orientation of the Congress, and the arrival of the Communists on the political scene with their radical agenda for the working class led to rather inconsistent engagement between the Congress and the working class. Although the workers were inspired by the nationalist sentiments, the Congress could not consistently mobilise them in its movements because it did not take up the core issues of the workers and did not support their militant movements due to the fear of antagonising the Indian industrialists. Therefore, the relationship between the Congress and the working class remained rather weak, despite the fact that many individual Congress persons were involved in workers' struggles.

26.6 EXERCISES

1) Why did the early nationalists oppose the legislation for improving the conditions of the workers?

2) What were Gandhi's views on the relationship between labour and capital?

3) Discuss the relationship between the Congress and the workers during the early 1920s.

4) Describe the response of the workers to the Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements.

UNIT 27 THE CAPITALIST CLASS*

Structure

27.1 Introduction

27.2 Debate on the Relationship between the Congress and the Capitalists

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27.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will discuss the relationship between Indian national movement and the Indian capitalist class. Much heated debate has been generated on this issue among historians for a long time. This Unit will acquaint you with this debate before analysing the various features of responses of the capitalist class and the nationalist movement towards each other since the beginning. It is important to understand that the relationship between a vast and ambitious national movement and a fledgling class which was partly dependent for its existence and growth on the colonial connections would be fraught with many inconsistencies which cannot be encapsulated within a singular narrative.

27.5 DEBATE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE CAPITALISTS

There has been heated debate among the historians of India on the relationship between the capitalist class and the national movement, particularly the stream represented by the Congress. Quite often the lines are so sharply drawn that it is difficult to find a common ground. The Marxist historians have generally taken a very critical view of the link between the Congress and the capitalists. M.N. Roy, the initiator of Marxist historiography in India, considered the Congress as basically a bourgeois organisation which ceased to be progressive and turned reactionary and an ally of imperialism as a result of the surging mass movement during the early 1920s. R.P. Dutt, another important Marxist ideologue and historian, regarded the Indian bourgeoisie (in which he included the leadership of the Congress) as basically a national bourgeoisie which had a dual characteristic. In his book, *India Today*, he argued that the Indian bourgeoisie had a genuine contradiction with imperialism and resisted the onslaught of foreign

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goods and capital, but, when faced with the spectre of mass upsurge, it sided with imperialism. He also identified the Congress with bourgeois interests.

Another set of Marxist thinkers, such as Suniti K. Ghosh, argue that 'the Indian capitalist class comprised and comprises two categories: one that is big is comprador and the other that is small and medium is national' [S.K. Ghosh 1988: 2445]. Ghosh asserts that the Indian big bourgeoisie had been an ally of imperialism in India since its beginning. According to Amiya K. Bagchi, the abolition of feudalism and establishment of proper capitalist relations were not part of the agenda of either the British capitalist in India or of Indian capitalists. The Indian capitalist class has mostly professed a reactionary ideology which disregarded democratic and secular values. [A.K. Bagchi 1991].

G.K. Lieten argues that while the Indian capitalist class was comprador earlier, it became national in character since the 1920s. However, during the high tide of nationalism, as during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the big Bombay capitalists were 'rather on the side of the colonial administration than on the side of the nationalist forces'. [G.K. Lieten 1983: 33]. According to Lieten, the strategy of both the capitalists and the dominant section of the Congress were short-term struggle and long-term compromise. While industrial depression, boycott and violence hung over the heads of the industrialists, it 'forced them into the role of brokers between the Congress-led nationalist movement and the colonial government'. The Indian bourgeoisie did not always remain within the ambit of nationalism, but quite often tried to enter into separate agreements with colonial government behind the back of the Congress. The Indian capitalist class played a dual role attempting to be on the side of both the nationalists and the colonial rulers.

Kapil Kumar asserts that the capitalists played a crucial role in determining the policies of the Congress. He argues that the capitalist class followed a conscious strategy of controlling the peasant movements, supporting the right wing in the Congress, financing individual Congress leaders on personal basis, buying large chunks of land, and pressurising the Congress to ban Kisan Sabhas. [Kapil Kumar 1991].

On the other hand, an important group of historians, prominently Bipan Chandra, Aditya Mukherjee, and Bhagwan Josh strongly argue that the Indian capitalist class was anti-imperialist, had developed into a conscious collectivity by the 1920s, and was in the nationalist camp particularly since the 1920s. They insist that there was an irresolvable and antagonistic contradiction between Indian bourgeoisie and colonialism. Therefore, there was no possibility of any long-term compromise between them. Thus, it was owing to economic factors that the Indian capitalist class opposed imperialism as it was hampering its long-term growth. The leading capitalists clearly recognized this situation and sided with the Congress against colonial government.

Bipan Chandra argues that the Indian capitalist class never played the role of comprador nor was it subordinated to British capital at any stage. While the Indian economy as a whole was structurally subordinated to imperialism, the Indian capitalist class was an independent class which struggled against imperialism and for independent capitalist development. However, it was also sometimes compelled to compromise with imperialism as it was the capitalist

class of a colonial and underdeveloped economy. The economic weakness of the Indian capitalist class was the reason for its political weakness and its partial dependence on the colonial government. It had a two-fold relationship with imperialism: 'long-term antagonism and short-term accommodation and dependence'. He, however, concedes that the 'overwhelming majority of the capitalists could not … be described as active anti-imperialist' [Bipan Chandra 1979].

Aditya Mukherjee strongly puts forward the view that the Indian capitalist class remained broadly within the nationalist camp particularly since the 1920s. It believed that only a national government could bring about economic development in India. The ideological and political position of the Indian capitalists was far in advance of their actual economic position which was quite weak. According to Mukherjee, the Indian capitalist class evolved into a 'mature self-conscious class' in struggle against the colonial rule and British capitalist class. It also was able to overcome the internal contradiction so as to emerge as the first class-conscious group in colonial India. The Indian capitalist class tried successful strategy to contain the left trends without, however, going on the side of imperialism. It always remained on the side of nationalist forces, even though it encouraged and strengthened the nationalist right wing to restrict the influence of socialists and communists. The Indian bourgeoisie was successful in projecting its own class interests as the strategic national interest. This could happen because in the colonial situation, 'there was, up to a point, a genuine unity of interest between the national bourgeoisie and the rest of society, as all of them were oppressed by imperialism'. [Mukherjee and Mukherjee 1988]. Although there were certain differences between the capitalists and the nationalists, these differences finally got 'resolved around a compromise programme, with each group… making substantial alterations in their original stands'. There was also no fundamental difference between the approaches of the left nationalists such as Nehru and K.T. Shah and the capitalist class so far as planning and the nature of state's role in it was concerned. Both groups shared certain common basic ideas, the most important of these being 'the overthrow of the colonial state structure', and 'its replacement by an independent indigenous capitalist state structure'. Mukherjee regards the Bombay Plan (1944) as the embodiment of the Indian capitalists' desire for a national government, economic planning and independent economic development. Although there were some differences between them regarding the methods to be adopted to achieve these goals and the extent of state intervention, both groups showed remarkable unity in their basic assumptions [A. Mukherjee 1978].

Bhagwan Josh emphasises that the Congress should not be viewed simplistically as a bourgeois party but should be considered as an anti-imperialist front for all Indian people, an all-class party which was not guided by the will of any particular group or served the interests of any one section of Indian society. There was no pre-determined direction in which the national movement moved. Its direction was decided by how the representatives of various conflicting classes struggled to achieve their hegemony. The march of the national movement did not depend on the participation or non-participation of the capitalists. At various points of time the Congress received support from sections of traders, merchants, businesspeople and industrialists while several sections opposed it. The Congress engaged in both constitutional and non-constitutional struggles against foreign rule. However, the capitalist class only supported the constitutional forms of

struggle and kept aloof or even opposed the non-constitutional forms [Bhagwan Josh 1991].

Claude Markovits is opposed to the idea that the Indian capitalists had evolved into a conscious class. He argues that the capitalist class even during the 1930s had not evolved into a 'very articulate capitalist class capable of acting as a unified lobby and of pursuing a long-term policy to achieve well-defined objectives'. Despite the awareness of common interests among some capitalists, there was no long-term unity of purpose. Moreover, the economic nationalism professed by the Congress was not the main reason for the capitalists to support the Congress whenever it did. The more important factor in the link between Gandhi and the capitalists was that 'between Hindu banias and a Hindu political leader, rather than a link between an emerging capitalist class and a national leader'. This relationship had a large religious component and was traditional in nature. The most modern sections of the capitalists, such as the Tatas, were in fact the 'least pro-nationalist' [C. Markovits 1985: 182, 189].

Dwijendra Tripathi presents a variegated picture of capitalists' response to the national movement. In the initial phase, before the arrival of the Gandhian mass movements, the Indian capitalist class was weak and did not see much conflict of interest with the British business as it was dependent on British technology, and technical and even managerial personnel for establishing industries in India. After the First World War, when the capitalists in India grew in strength a conflict with the British capital became inevitable. However, the capitalist class did not sever its links with the British business. It also could not afford to antagonise the intensifying national movement led by the Congress and Gandhi. To cope with the situation, it evolved a four-pronged strategy: '(1) keep aloof from the confrontationist politics of the Congress, (2) support constructive activity of the Congress to establish a claim on its gratitude, (3) influence policy formulation within Congress, and (4) act in unison with nationalist forces in legislative assemblies and similar other forums' [S.P. Thakur 1989: 1437-8].

According to Manali Chakrabarti, the Indian big business class advocated economic nationalist policies during the inter-war period. However, it was not only the Indian but also the British business class located in India which wanted protectionist measures for Indian industries. However, despite their orientation towards economic nationalism since the 1930s, the capitalist class was basically guided by their economic interests rather than any attachment to nationalist sentiments. [M. Chakrabarti 2009: 1031].

27.3 EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF THE CAPITALIST CLASS IN INDIA

Most early Indian industrialists developed from the merchants who played the role of middlemen and collaborators for British businessmen. There was thus a harmonious relationship in the early period between the big Indian businessmen and the British capitalists and the latter served as models for setting up industries in India in the initial period. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Indian capitalists were beginning to mark their independence by forming their own organisations such as the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in 1887 and the Indian Merchants Chamber of Bombay in 1907.

There was steady growth of Indian industries since the mid-nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Indian capital was dominant in cotton industry. The growth of mills continued until the mid-1890s when a series of developments – such as the Bubonic Plague, currency fluctuations, famine and communal riots – seriously disrupted the growth story. The faith in the beneficial effects of the Raj began to dwindle.

Since the First World War, the Indian capitalists made inroads into many sectors. The processes of import substitution, expansion of domestic market, growth of internal trade and transfer of capital from moneylending and land to industrial investment resulted in increasing control of Indian capital. Thus, by 1944, about 62 per cent of larger industrial units and 95 per cent of smaller industrial units were controlled by Indian capital. Industries such as sugar, cement, paper, iron and steel were established almost anew by Indian capitalists. In the industries such as jute, mining and plantations, which had been under prolonged dominance by foreign capital, Indian capital moved in substantial quantities. Indian investment in cotton textiles grew enormously so that by 1919 the share of British cotton textile industry in India's domestic consumption fell down to 40% and the Indian cotton manufacturers also made inroads into some foreign markets such as China. In another big industry—Jute—it was the British capital which had held almost total domination until the early twentieth century. However, during the period between 1914 and 1947, there was a rapid expansion of the Indian capital in jute industry owing to several national and international factors. During this period, the Indian capitalist class also grew significantly in size.

27.4 CAPITALIST RESPONSE TO NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN EARLY PHASE

The fortunes of most of the big merchants and industrialists in the nineteenth century were made under the aegis of the colonial government. Close collaboration with the British business and the need for British technical skill in the early years of industries had resulted in dependence upon the colonial rulers. The Indian businessmen kept a political low profile and tended to be on the right side of the rulers for the smooth conduct of their business and industry. The top echelons of Indian businessmen also maintained close social links with the British. However, through the Bombay Association (formed in 1852), some of Bombay's businesspeople experienced some amount of political activity and acquired some political awareness. Later during the Ilbert Bill controversy, some of prominent businessmen, led by Jamsetji Jejeebhoy, participated in a big public meeting called by some nationalist leaders such as Pherozeshah Mehta, Dadabhai Naoroji and Badruddin Tyabji on 28 April 1883. In Bombay Presidency Association, established in January 1885, some of Bombay businessmen and entrepreneurs participated. Some of them were also a part of the Indian National Congress when it was founded in December 1885. The Congress received small donations from individual businessmen although the Indian business community as a body did not financially contribute much. On the whole, between 1850 and 1895, with some exceptions, the political involvement of the Bombay millowners was negligible.

Thus, despite the display of political awareness and the realisation that the colonial government gave precedence to the British cotton industry over Indian ones, the Indian industrialists were too weak and too dependent on British technology to

support the Swadeshi movement. On the other hand, the leaders of the Swadeshi movement vociferously supported the Indian industries which benefitted many Indian industrialists, such as the Tatas, in mobilising capital for their ventures. But the big capitalists generally remained opposed to the Swadeshi movement. Such disclination to support the nationalist cause also derived from selfish motives. At the height of the Swadeshi movement, the cotton millowners profited enormously due to high demand for Indian cloths. But they hiked the prices of the cloth and refused to lower them even on nationalist request. The Indian businessmen benefited from the Swadeshi movement in many other ways, but they generally refused to support it openly or as a collective. Thus despite the tariff laws of 1878 and 1894, which were against the interests of Indian industries and which the Indian millowners bitterly resented, the millowners as a group generally remained entirely loyal to the Raj during this period. [See Gita Piramal 1991 and B.R. Nanda 1991]

27.5 IDEOLOGY OF THE EARLY NATIONALISTS

The economic ideology of the early nationalists favoured a system of independent capitalist development in the country. Economic nationalism, as the early nationalist economic thought has been called, was basically bourgeois nationalism which sought to formulate economic policies which would promote national development without dependence on a foreign country. However, their aim was not to benefit just one class—the capitalists. Instead, they professed industrialism as the remedy for the poverty of the country. They wanted capitalist development because it could, in their view, alleviate the miseries of the Indian people in general. Despite the fact that during the early period the Indian industrialists were basically pro-government and did not contribute much to the national movement, the early nationalists favoured the capitalist path because they believed that only through capitalist industrialisation the country could become independent and prosperous.

The nationalist leaders worked to introduce the spirit of entrepreneurship among the people, urged the need for promoting technical and industrial education, tried to help in mobilisation of internal sources of capital, preached that Indian poverty and backwardness was due to lack of industries which must be revived if India could progress, and asked the Indian people to use only Indian-made (Swadeshi) goods. By the end of the nineteenth century, most nationalist leaders strongly demanded that India should be rapidly industrialised. They severely criticised the free trade policies of the colonial rulers and demanded that tariff barriers should be raised for the protection of emerging modern industries in India. They argued for the state intervention to promote, sustain and strengthen the Indian industries. Some nationalist leaders formed industrial associations and organised industrial conferences and exhibitions in order to spread the ideas of industrialism among people in general and entrepreneurs in particular. M.G. Ranade, for example, was among the founders of the Industrial Association of Western India in 1890. Finding the colonial government not only lacking in efforts to help the Indian industries but also hampering their growth in favour of British industries, the nationalists criticised the government on all such issues on every available forum. [Bipan Chandra 1966: 55-141, 736-759.].

27.6 MASS NATIONALISM AND THE CAPITALISTS

In the course of Gandhian phase of mass nationalism beginning from the 1918, we can discern various responses from the capitalists which included the industrialists, merchants and traders. Since the big industrialists generally dominated the attention of the media as well as the government and nationalists, their reactions to mass nationalism should be more closely analysed. We will discuss the responses of the industrialists and the nationalists towards each other in basically three phases: from the Rowlatt Satyagraha to the Simon Commission, during the Civil Disobedience Movement and during the War, and finally after the War.

27.6.1 From Rowlatt Satyagraha to Simon Commission

The mass and agitational phase of nationalism, beginning in 1918, unsettled the industrialists and big business groups, and prompted even those few capitalists, who had earlier supported the movement, to withdraw. During this period, the large business houses did not provide any support to the Congress. In fact, many of them actively opposed the movement and for this received favours from the colonial government, including knighthood. Another factor in political inactivity of the industrialists was a series of long labour strikes, particularly in Bombay, led by the Communists. The fear of socialism and violent labour unrest pushed the millowners closer to the government. The government also supported the industrialists in their fight against labour and by 1930 the workers' agitations and unions had been suppressed.

During the Rowlatt Satyagraha and the Non-cooperation movement very few capitalists made donations for the Congress, and no industrialist signed the satyagraha pledge against the Rowlatt Bills in 1919. On the other hand, the actual support from the business class came from small traders and shopkeepers who generally supported the movement enthusiastically, participated in the *hartals* declared by the Congress, and also contributed to its funds. Gandhi was aware that his call for boycott of foreign goods would lead to profiteering by Indian industrialists. So, he exhorted them 'to conduct their business on national rather than on purely commercial lines'. But the industrialists did not pay any heed to his appeal. Motilal Nehru later criticised them for being 'bent on profiting by the sufferings of the nation'. Even as late as 1934, some Congress leaders were complaining that the industrialists did not contribute much to Congress funds to enable it to fight elections, and 'that the upper middle class and the industrialists are not at all taking their share of the burden of India's freedom' [B.R. Nanda 1991: 184-5, 186].

During the Non-Cooperation movement, Gandhi made it clear that whether the merchants and businesspersons complied with the call of boycott of foreign goods or not 'the country's march to freedom cannot be made to depend upon any corporation or groups of men. This is a mass manifestation. The masses are moving rapidly towards deliverance, and they must move whether with the aid of the organised capital or without' [cited in S. Bhattacharya 1976: 1828]. Although, Gandhi's thoughts were not in favour of capitalism as such, the capitalists and merchants found Gandhi's belief in non-violence as opposed to radical changes and his theory of trusteeship as a support to private property and wealth. There was a shrewd perception by many capitalists that their hope lay in

Gandhi for restraining the nationalist movement taking an anti-capitalist and radical stance. However, the big industrialists still did not come out in support of the national movement during the anti-Rowlatt agitations, even though the small traders were fully supportive and active. The small businesspeople, including the cotton merchants in Bombay, supported the Non-Cooperation Movement also despite facing personal losses, while the industrialists did not. Some industrialists such as Purshottamdas Thakurdas, Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Cowasji Jahangir and C. Setalvad openly opposed the movement. They formed an Anti-Non-cooperation Society in Bombay. The Congress and Gandhi noted that the success of the Swadeshi led to profiteering as the Indian cloth-producers enjoyed monopoly and in many cases arbitrarily increased prices. The industrialists, on their part, remained apprehensive of the mass movement and boycott as it might create labour problems in their mills. In fact, both profiteering by industrialists and hoarding by traders, and labour unrests in many industrial centres were noted.

From 1922 onwards, however, the slump in the industry compelled most industrialists to side with the Congress in its demand for protection for industries. The millowners and the Swarajists in the Legislative Assembly both called for the abolition of 3.5% excise duty on cotton. In the mid-1920s, their strategy was to try to influence the constitutionally-minded nationalist leaders to take a pro-Indian industry stand in the legislatures and to orient the Congress to speak in favour of business interests. It was in this period, that the Indian business community established their central organisation called FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers Commerce and Industry) in 1927. [See S. Bhattacharya 1976].

27.6.2 Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement

Once the depression in the industry set in, the industrialists wanted the government to take strong measures to minimise their losses. The demands of the industrialists included an increase in the duties on imported cotton goods, devaluation of rupee and no preferential treatment for the British cotton industries in Indian markets. The colonial government refused to concede any of these demands. Certain other developments raised fear among the Indian industrialists that the colonial government did not care for their interests. For example, the Ottawa Conference held in 1932 privileged the British industries in the colonial markets. Resentment against such imperial preferences ran high in the ranks of Indian capitalists. Similarly, the decision of the colonial government to link the Indian rupee to the British pound and fix the rupee-sterling ratio at 18d created suspicion in the minds of the Indian industrialists that the intentions of the government were not correct.

The disenchantment with the government led to pro-Congress tilt among the industrialists. The Congress also responded positively by including most of their demands in its list. Another factor was the rise of new groups among industrialists from among the merchants who had held pro-Congress positions. All this resulted in capitalist support for the early phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement. However, general capitalist support for the movement did not continue when Gandhi resumed the movement in 1932 after the failure of talks with the government. The rise of the Congress left wing and Nehru's left-leaning speeches further alienated the capitalists from the Congress. Their interest in pro-Congress politics was only revived during the late 1930s when the Congress decided to work the Government of India Act of 1935.

According to Claude Markovits, there were three phases in the political participation of the Indian capitalists during the 1930s: 'a phase of relative unity in 1930-1931, a phase of open split in 1932-1936 and a new phase of greater unity in 1936-1939'. The Indian business class initially supported the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi to get concessions from the British government, particularly related to its harmful currency policy. However, this support became lukewarm in the later stage due to militancy exhibited by workers and for the fear of widespread unrest. Still later, when the Congress put a brake on the mass agitational politics and decided to participate in constitutional politics, the capitalist class again started backing the Congress.

Before the launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Indian capitalists tried to convince Gandhi to avoid open confrontation with the government and to enter into negotiations with it. However, Gandhi had other ideas. He refused to attend the First Round Table Conference to be convened in London in November 1930 to talk about constitutional and political reforms. In the initial phase of the movement, the business groups suffering from Depression and irked by governmental apathy, extended support to the movement in the hope that it would pressurise the colonial regime to make concessions in financial and monetary matters. The more intelligent section of the capitalist class realised that 'it could not fight foreign interest without the weight of the Congress and therefore could not go further than Gandhiji….' Thus, the capitalist organisation FICCI, during the early phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement, supported the basic demands of the Congress by stating that 'No constitution will be acceptable to the country including the Indian mercantile community which does not give sufficient and effective power to a responsible Indian government to carry out the administrative and economic reforms indicated by Mahatma Gandhi'. The FICCI also restrained the industrialists from participating in the Round Table Conference as a mark of solidarity with the Congress, and Thakurdas was persuaded to resign his seat in the central legislative assembly. Many businessmen, as other Indians, felt naturally inclined to take a nationalist position. Thus, when Tata and a few other industrialists wanted to form a pro-government capitalist organisation, Purshottamdas strongly reacted by saying that 'Indian commerce and industry are only an integral part of Indian nationalism and that deprived of its inspiration in Indian nationalism, Indian commerce and Indian industry stand reduced to mere exploitation'.

During the second phase of Civil Disobedience, the capitalists were a divided lot. As the movement progressed and reached the masses while the government showed no signs of compromise, there occurred a split in the ranks of the big business class. One group, led by the Tatas, openly opposed the Congress and sought to derive all benefits from the imperial government it could under the circumstances. Another group, led by Ahmedabad millowners, sided with the Congress and took advantage of the latter's boycott of foreign goods 'to enlarge their share of the internal market for piecegoods at the expense of both Bombay and Lancashire'. This group, and the group led by Lala Shri Ram, remained solidly behind the Congress even during the period of its weakness. Yet another group, led by Birla and Thakurdas, sought to play the middlemen between the Congress and the colonial government. Birla exhorted the British government to realise that 'Gandhiji and men of his type are not only friends of India but also friends of Great Britain, and that Gandhiji is the greatest force on the side of

peace and order. He alone is responsible for keeping the left wing in India in check.'

In the third phase, the conservative policies of the imperial government, the vocal emergence of the left wing in the Congress, and the decline in Congress-led mass movement united the Indian capitalist class in their support to the moderate sections within the Congress. Thus, 'the Indian capitalists denounced the 1939 Indo-British Trade Pact, which was not basically harmful to Indian interests, while in the provinces the Congress ministries often took a tough anti-labour stance, which satisfied business interests'. The new Congress ministries therefore were faced with a difficult task: they had to try to reconcile the interests of both capital and labour which had supported them in the elections, and both equally hoped that Congress rule would bring benefits to them. The ministries were in danger of being subjected to contradictory pressures from above and from below. The Congress High Command, with which the capitalists wielded more influence than the trade unions, was likely to pressurize them towards taking a stand against labour; while local Congress organizations, more responsive to direct pressure from workers, would advocate support for their demands. The provincial governments would be hard put to find a middle way.

The various actions of the Congress ministries, particularly their labour policies began to convince the capitalists that the Congress was not against their interests and wished to promote inter-class conciliation. The Congress ministries, while making some concessions to the workers, tried to check labour militancy by participating actively in labour affairs. The labour struggles were viewed as disruptive and avoidable and a policy of mutual adjustment between workers and their employers was put forward. On the whole, the Congress provincial governments put at rest the fears of the industrialists that the Congress might not succeed in controlling labour. The Congress also allayed the fears of the capitalists that it did not desire to nationalise various sectors of economy and industry, and instead it would favour a policy of collaboration with private enterprises.

Though Congress provincial governments were not always successful in accommodating Indian capitalist interests and could not prevent conflicts from arising between them and sections of the business class, an overall view of the two years of Congress rule in the provinces reveals that a certain amount of stabilization did occur in relations between business and Congress. While during the Second World War many businessmen reverted to a policy of close collaboration with the British authorities in order to benefit from the war orders, the business class as a whole did not break with the Congress during the war period. When the Congress Party made its final bid for power, businessmen found themselves in a position to influence developments to a certain extent.

In the beginning of the Second World War, the Congress ministries resigned to protest the unilateral decision of the imperial regime to include India in the War. However, the Congress decided not to seriously hinder the war efforts of the government. The industrialists also cooperated with the government and supplied goods and services required for the war. But some of them did not hesitate to declare their support for the Congress as G.L. Mehta, the FICCI president, stated: 'Indian commercial organizations did not feel apologetic about the fact that they were fully in accord with the essentials of Congress demand for freedom and transfer of power.'

And yet, when the Quit India movement was launched, many industrialists, including Thakurdas, openly stood against open confrontation with the colonial government. But some of them allowed their workers to go on strike to express solidarity with the jailed Congress leaders. On the whole, however, the capitalists pursued the dual policy of deriving maximum benefit from their support to the government in its war efforts while at the same time making overtures to some of the Congress leaders and occasionally contributing to the Congress funds. [C. Markovits 1985: 179, 180; D. Tripathi 1991: 109, 110, 106, 96, 97, 115; C. Markovits 1981: 498, 524, 526; M. Chakrabarti 2009: 1012].

Bipan Chandra argues that the leaders of the Indian capitalists were farsighted who deftly handled the radicalism of Nehru in the mid-1930s, and managed to persuade him to follow a bourgeois liberal path of growth. It was their biggest achievement which kept the socialist radicals at bay by supporting the right-wing of the Congress which increasingly became stronger as freedom approached. Although a group of capitalists in Bombay reacted strongly against Nehru's radical speeches, most other industrialists took a more cautious stand. Birla and others put their faith in Congress right wing and in Gandhi to restrain Nehru. They were successful in their 'strategy of nursing him, opposing him, and, above all, of supporting the right wing in the Congress' which 'played an important role in first containing him and then moulding him so that, by 1947, the capitalist class was ready to accept him as the Prime Minister of independent India and to cooperate with him in the task of building up its economy along the capitalist path' [Bipan Chandra 1979: 198.].

27.6.3 Post-War Period

Due to the ambivalent attitude of the Indian capitalist class, it never had a decisive influence on the nationalist politics. However, by early 1940s when it was clear that colonial rule would end, the capitalist class veered towards the position adopted by the Congress as was clear in its major policy document, the Bombay Plan, in 1944. After the War, when the capitalists realised that the Congress might come to power sooner than later, they became openly supportive of the Congress and even backed the idea of long-term economic planning and state control of certain industries, particularly heavy industries. Although the capitalists had not given much support to, not even shown much interest in, the National Planning Committee (NPC) instituted by the Congress in 1938, they later produced in 1944 the Bombay Plan which supported state initiative and control in certain sectors of national economy.

An important section of the Congress, since the early 1930s, had professed the idea of centrally planned economy. Subhas Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others expressed their strong opinion on this issue. They considered state-sponsored forced industrialisation as the only way to pull India out of poverty and unemployment, as well as to boost national security. The capitalists were somewhat cautious about this view during the 1930s. But during the 1940s, they became quite convinced about the merit of full-scale state intervention in capital goods and defence-related industries.

Although the capitalist class increased its strength after the First World War, and particularly during the 1930s, it still was not strong enough to independently carry out industrialisation in India without the help of the state. Moreover, the threat of foreign competition (from Japan, Germany, America and Britain) loomed

large. The Indian capitalists, therefore, chalked out a plan which supported the role of a national state and planning in initiating and sustaining an independent capitalist development in the country free from imperial control and providing protection to the national capital against the inflow of foreign capital. The Bombay Plan, devised by the Indian capitalists, in 1944 proposed the role of a national state in promotion of industrialisation, particularly in the areas of heavy and capital goods industries as well as in developing infrastructure. The Indian capitalist class realised that it was not strong enough to undertake investment in such core areas of economy. It, therefore, emphasised the crucial role of state's intervention and control in such areas. The desire to free the country's economy from foreign control was another important motivating factor behind the support of the capitalist class for state's role. [D. Lockwood 2012; A. Mukherjee 1976].

27.7 AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CAPITALISTS' ATTITUDE TO THE CONGRESS

There seems to be a pattern in the response of the industrialists to the Congress. While in a peaceful atmosphere they openly supported the Congress on important issues of national importance, in times of mass movements they were extremely hesitant and appeared to be siding with the government. Even though the Congress received support from the capitalists in various forms since the 1920s, it does not mean that the capitalists influenced the Congress policies and programmes in any significant ways. Whatever little influence it did have was limited to the conservative section of the Congress. The popular orientation and massive organisation of the Congress could not make it pursue a straight pro-capitalist line. Although the businessmen contributed to Congress funds, they could not dictate terms about its policies. In any case, their contribution to the overall Congress funds was relatively small. Moreover, the ambivalent response of the capitalists to the Congress did not really empower them to decide the policies of the Congress. If the Congress advanced towards a capitalist path of development, it was owing to its own ideology, and not due to any direct or indirect pressure by the capitalists.

Reacting against the adverse economic policies of the colonial government, the Indian industrialists looked forward to the Congress as a counterweight to colonialism. However, the fear of mass upheaval in general, and industrial unrest in particular, were inhibiting factors in their full-fledged support to the Congress. There have always been differences within the ranks of the Indian capitalists in their attitude towards Congress and the Raj. For example, during the 1920s, while Birla supported the Congress, Thakurdas opposed it and sought the active cooperation of the Liberals for creating a moderate political constituency.

Although the Indian capitalists by and large supported the national movement since the 1920s, it favoured constitutional forms of struggle and the idea of sorting problems out at the negotiating table. They wanted moderate constitutionalism and favourable policies for industrial development. They sought a conciliation between the Congress and colonial government which would alleviate the fear of radical mass upsurge. They were generally opposed to prolonged mass struggles as it would unleash the revolutionary forces which could be a threat to capitalism. The capitalists were also against any long-drawn movement which would antagonise the government and hamper the business activities.

The Congress, on its part, tried to take the capitalists on board in their bid to launch an all-class movement. But it was not willing to compromise on fundamental issues. So, although the big business was apprehensive about the Gandhian mass movements, the Congress went ahead with them despite strong reservation of the capitalists. Although many capitalists believed that Gandhi would act on their behalf, Gandhi had his own plans and ideas to fight against colonialism. At one stage, the opposition of the Bombay industrialists to the Civil Disobedience Movement prompted the Congress Working Committee to draw up in August 1930 'a list of 24 mills in Bombay which were to be boycotted'.

Some capitalists joined the national movement in their individual capacities and went to jails, such as Jamnalal Bajaj, Vadilal Mehta, Samuel Aaron, and Lala Shankar Lal. Some others such as G.D. Birla, Ambalal Sarabhai and Walchand Hirachand generously contributed to Congress funds. So far as small traders and merchants were concerned, they actively supported and participated in the national movement.

The rise of a strong left wing in the Congress made the capitalist class to reassess the situation and make adjustments accordingly lest the movement would go in a radical direction. The capitalists also avoided forming an exclusive party of their own as it would have been counter-productive. Instead, they strongly supported the right-wing in the Congress which, in their opinion, would protect their interests by keeping the struggle within constitutional limits and which would be opposed to radical elements inside and outside the Congress. Thus, the Indian capitalists, particularly the more farsighted among them, fought on two fronts simultaneously. On the one hand, they resented the imperialist policies which hampered their growth, and on the other, they were apprehensive of the radical and revolutionary forces which worked against capitalism.

27.8 SUMMARY

During the nineteenth century, the Indian capitalists, particularly the industrialists, were quite weak and could not antagonise the colonial government in order to facilitate the import of machinery and technicians from Britain. Thus, although the nationalists took a strong pro-Indian industry position, the Indian industrialists did not support the national movement. In the twentieth century, there was a massive intensification of nationalist sentiments and activities giving rise to huge mass movements. The Congress was the leading organization and Gandhi was the most important leader who inspired and guided these mass mobilizations. The relationship of the Indian capitalist class with the Congress, and particularly with Gandhi, was generally harmonious. Moreover, some leaders of the class spoke a similar anti-colonial language which the Congress used. However, full support to the Congress was not forthcoming as the Congress did not orient its political and economic agenda in complete favour of the capitalists. Nevertheless, the rise of the nationalist movement gave opportunity to the capitalist class to put increased pressure on the government to grant concessions to it. Until the 1940s, the big capitalists generally remained ambivalent in their support to the Congress. Only during the 1940s, when it had become clear that the Congress would come to power, they openly sided with the Congress and its policies.

27.9 EXERCISES

1) Why did the Indian industrialists not support the national movement in the early period even while the nationalist leaders strongly professed a Swadeshi ideology?

2) Discuss the varying positions of the Indian capitalists with regard to the national movement in the period between 1930 and 1942.

3) Give a brief assessment of the Indian capitalists' attitude to the Congress.

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UNIT 28 THE LANDLORDS*

Structure

28.1 Introduction

28.2 Permanent Settlement

28.3 Other Forms of Land Administration

28.4 Landlords after the Revolt of 1857

28.5 Landlords and Early Nationalists

28.6 Landlords and the Nationalist Movement during the 1920s and 1930s

28.7 Congress, the Left and the Position of Landlords

28.8 Summary

28.9 Exercises

28.1 INTRODUCTION

The livelihood of an overwhelming number of Indians depended throughout solely on agriculture, and consequently on the agricultural use of land. Land being thus the basis of life and life-style in India, the management of its cultivation, cultivators and beneficiaries was found to be the matter of paramount importance in the country's political economy. Since the users benefitted from the use of land, or its produce, and land belonged to the state, the Government had a right to make some demand on the benefits of land and extract revenue or tax from its users. As the land revenue – the Government's earning from land – was the major source to finance the state's functioning, it had to be apportioned on all the users carefully and justifiably, and collected from them regularly and efficiently. Fixing and enumerating the tax demand on a plot with the help of revenue officials for a specified period were not easy at all, but enforcing the collection every year within a stipulated time had always been immensely difficult. In this Unit, you will learn about a group of landholders which flourished under the colonial rule.

28.2 PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

The collection of the taxed amount was generally found to be convenient through a system of assignment, by which the assignees were contracted for collecting and depositing the tax in time to the Government treasury in lieu of grants of land. The administration of land in India was, therefore, run with the help of revenue officials and the collectors, appointed and assigned, respectively, by the Government. In the pre-colonial period the revenue officials were the *Patwaris*, *Chaudharies* and *Quanungos*, as well as *Patels*, *Deshmukhs*, *Deshpandes* and others, backed up by the administrative hands like the *Faujdars*. The most conspicuous among the assignees were the *Zamindars* or the small *rajas* and chieftains, exercising authority over large tracts of territories and their inhabitants in return of the payment annually to the Government the fixed amount of tax from the land-users or cultivators. The other assignees of significance were the

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Jagirdars who received grants of land from the State (*jagirs*) for their services to the authorities, usually of military nature, on condition of collecting yearly tax for the Government from those cultivating within their domains. The Government also farmed out the responsibilities for tax collection to the *Talukdars* and *Ijaradars* of *taluks* (a good number of villages) or parts of *Parganas* in their respective regions, by allowing them, of course, to retain a certain percentage of the collection for themselves as fees. There were also *Muqaddams* or village headmen who acted as *Talukdars'* agents for collecting the tax in a village and enjoyed some compensation for their exertions. Apart from the percentage of collection they received from the Government, the collectors of each category gained from the difference between what they pulled out of the peasants and what they actually deposited to the treasury, representing their profit or rent. The rent-receivers or the landlords set their own demands for collection so high as to squeeze the maximum out of the cultivators or the *raiyats*, and leave them "not enough for survival". (Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Moghul India, 1556-1707*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 367.) The lure of rent from land or the income they hardly had earned by working on it, was so great and utterly irresistible that every category which had a link with its administration (apart from perhaps the *Zamindars* and *Jagirdars* who had more than enough on their plates), be it the *Talukdars*, *Ijardars*, *Kanamdars*, *Mirasdars* and *Muqaddams* (who had their own plots or *Khud-Kashta* to be tilled by agricultural wage-earners), or the *Patwais*, *Patels*, *Quanungos*, *Deshmukhs* etc. – all went for a mad rush to acquire for themselves as much land as possible. The scramble resulted in an amorphous growth of variegated landlordism in India, led by the big landlords and followed by the medium, the small and even the tiny ones. Land under this feudal system was neglected, irrigation suffered, production fell and cultivators fleeced, over and above their being ruefully dependent on the landlords for tenure, family welfare and social security. Such landlordist economic and social exploitation that grew rapidly in the pre-colonial days continued unabated throughout the colonial rule over India.

At the beginning of the colonial period the British were oblivious of how landlordism and landlords had been functioning in India and with what effects. They seemed to be happy, as were the later Moghuls ahead of them, to find their coffers being filled up with the revenue collections by the intermediaries – those high or not so high rentiers of land between them and the *raiyats*. Their viewing the agrarian scenario did not vary much from 1765, when they secured the *Diwani* rights over the imperial (Mughal) revenue, till 1793 – the time the Permanent Settlement of land was introduced by them in large part of the country, i.e. the Bengal Presidency. For the first time the Company raj appeared in 1793 to have been concerned about the unsatisfactory state of affairs in Indian agriculture – the main source of its income. Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement had not aimed at destabilising the arrangement of intermediary, but systematising it and rendering it congenial for agricultural advancement. By entering into a settlement with the *Zamindars* or the big landlords for good on a modest state demand, and by conferring them the property rights over their *Zamindaris*, provided they did not fail to pay their taxes, Cornwallis made the *Zamindardom*, or landlordism at the apex, to be attractive on the British aristocratic line of his time for investment in land, and therefore, for taking good care of it to get increasingly profitable returns. Consequently, the *Zamindari* Settlement, since the Permanent Settlement was meant to be made only with the *Zamindars*, lured a large number of merchants

and business magnates to buy *Zamindari* estates from those existing *Zamindars* who had been encumbered with the mounting cost of luxurious living, as well as of unpaid Government taxes. The new *Zamindars* thus bought their *Zamindaris* in some kind of distress sales at a permanently low tax rate, and were in a position – being masters of the domains – to squeeze out high rent from the tenants (*raiyats*) and dispossess and replace them at will for extracting irregular levies of all imaginable kinds.

28.3 OTHER FORMS OF LAND ADMINISTRATION

The predicament of the tenants (*raiyats*) and their helplessness under the *Zamindari* system was bound sooner or later to become too conspicuous in the eyes of the Company raj. And so was to loom disconcertingly very high the disadvantage of having intermediaries between the Government and the tenants, and of not having any direct touch with the *raiyat* cultivators. In fact the disadvantage seemed to the authorities to be steadily outweighing the advantage of their enjoying the loyalist *Zamindari* support, and of course, some relief from the rigours and strains of tax collection. The alternative was to give up henceforth all the intermediaries altogether, and undertake the meticulous process of collecting revenue in the hard way, i.e. directly from the *raiyats* – the tillers of the soil. The method that came to be known as the *Raiyatwari* Settlement, based on a plot-wise survey of land, settled for a certain period and revised thereafter, was introduced in the non-*Zamindari* areas of the Madras and the Bombay Presidencies during the first two decades of the 19th century. Coinciding with the Industrial Revolution, and falling under the spell of the rising industrial bourgeoisie in Britain, the Company raj at this point appeared to have started disliking the feudal conditions that prevailed in India and taking increasingly an anti-landlordist stand. This trend, apparent between the 1830s and the 1850s, was discernible in the North-Western Provinces and Bombay-Deccan, or the areas that remained outside the pale of both the *Zamindari* and the *Raiyatwari* settlements. In these areas was nurtured the *Mahalwari* or the village community-based Settlements, cutting severely down the *Jagirdari* and *Talukdari* dominance, throwing overboard other existing intermediaries (various kinds of *sanad*-holders, *Muafidars, Bisedars, Lakhirajdars* etc.), settling land directly with the cultivators for a fixed period, pending revision, and collecting tax with the help of the community and village heads.

It was when the *Mahalwari* Settlement started taking shape in the northern and central parts of the country, and the *Raiyatwari* Settlement being revised in the Bombay-Deccan, between the mid-1820s and the mid-1850s, that landlordism was treated most contemptuously by the Company raj. The aftermath of the Industrial Revolution also saw the rise of the bourgeoisie to power in Britain and the emphatic expression of their hostility towards the British aristocracy. Bred in an emerging industrial society and fed with the liberalist Utilitarian denunciation of feudalism, the new arrivals among the Company raj's high officials were openly hostile against the landlords, and they fondly hoped for displacing landlordism to make room for bourgeois developments in India, initially in its agriculture. Their onslaught on the landlords was concentrated mainly on the legitimacy of their rights over the domains they so unhesitatingly lorded, and also on the regularity with which they were required to collect revenue from their estates and pass it unfailingly to the Government. If the *Zamindari, Jagirdari* and the *Talukdari* titles were not found to be in order, the *sanads* for their claims not

substantiated and the revenue payment to the treasury not regular, the Government took the landlords to the courts of law, cancelled their deeds and resumed or appropriated their estates for settlement with others. There were scorching enquiries into the claims for the *Badshahi*, *Nawabi* and even early Company raj's land-grants to *Lakhirajdars*, *Maufudars*, *Inamdars* and other *sanad*-holders, and also such revenue collectors as the *Malguzars*, *Patwaris*, *Lambardars* etc. Many who could not justify jurisdiction over land in their possession lost either the whole or parts of it. Those who lost the whole were summarily pensioned off, and those who managed to save a part or parts were deprived much of their usurped domains. Raja of Mainpuri, for example, lost *Talukdari* rights over 116 out of 158 villages in the 1840s, and so did Raja Moorsun in Aligarh over 138 of 216 villages. "Lapsed" succession and questionable adoption were also used as pleas by the Company raj, especially under Lord Dalhousie, for the forfeiture of numerous landlords' lands.

The systematic setting aside of landlords of various sizes – big and small – was carried out by the Company raj mostly at the instances of such outstanding devotees of the principles of bourgeois-liberal political economy as Holt Mackenzie, Bird, Thomason and Thornton in the North-Western Provinces and Wingate and Goldsmith in the Bombay-Deccan. They received the support of the Company raj's high-priests (Governors General) of the time between Bentinck and Dalhousie from 1828 to 1856. The landlords on their part did try to withstand the Government's offensive by fighting litigations in the law-courts, petitioning the Governors and Governors General, appealing pathetically to the Court of Directors and Board of Control in London, and even forming in Calcutta in 1839 the Landholders' Society to organise collective resistance. Nothing, however, seemed to be working in their favour, and the Government's campaign generally against feudalism, and particularly against the landlords' usurpation of land, and their living on unearned income and flaunting it all-around, continued unabated – without breaks. The landlords clearly were losing their battle with the Company raj in the vast Indian countryside because of the juridical and moral weakness of their position, but more, and primarily on account of their overbearing oligarchic isolation from the rural populace, including the peasant masses – those poverty-stricken, faceless millions whose enormous number in itself was of some unrecognisable strength. Although heavily dependent on the landlords and habitually respectful to them, the peasantry and others could not but be apathetic towards, if not openly resentful of, the landlords, because of their economic and social exploitation of the entire rural society. Their support base having thus been shrunk into a handful of relatives, dependants, courtiers (*musahibs*) and retinues, the landlords were hardly in a position to stand up to the Company raj's aggression.

28.4 LANDLORDS AFTER THE REVOLT OF 1857

The landlords' falling into a state of helplessness would have gone on much further had there not been a significant change creeping into the Company raj's fortunes in the agricultural sector. While embarking on anti-landlordism, the British authorities thought of revising the method of land assessment in such a way as to render their revenue demand more equitable for both the *raiyats* and the State, and thereby also favourable for agricultural improvement. They decided to do this on the basis of the Ricardian Theory of Rent in the West, by taxing the "net" produce of land rather than its "gross" produce. In the maze of detailed

land surveys and assessment procedures for finding out the "net" produce (by deducting from the "gross", the cost of cultivation and labour, as well as some margin of profit), the Company raj's revenue mandarins lost their way. They eventually ended up by imposing an exorbitant rate of land tax on the cultivators and enforcing its strict collection from them. The over-assessment between the 1820s and the 1850s increased at the least by 20 per cent (in Hissar and Rohtak), some time even by 70 per cent (in Delhi and the neighbourhood) and on an average by 46 per cent (in Bundelkhand). Its severe collection without any remission resulted in the mounting of arrears of rent and peasant indebtedness, auction sales of land and desertions of field, jacqueries and suicides. Subjected to harsh over-assessment, and consequently to economic distress, the peasants were intensely aggrieved with the Government, and poised for standing up against it. The time of their unrest reached a flash-point in 1857, an ignition provided by the British-Indian army's mutinous sepoys – many of whom came from among them. The revolt of 1857 could not have become the Great Revolt, which threatened the Company raj's very existence, without the widespread participation of the peasants and other sections of the civil population, including of course the disgruntled aristocrats and landlords.

The great revolt of 1857-58 proved to be the turning point in the history of the landlords and feudal elements in India, both for their stakes in current situation as well as for their progress in the future. The existing situation offered the opportunity to take on their tormentor – the Company raj – frontally in conjunction with an aroused rural society. This joining of hands of the landlords and the cultivators catapulted the socially overbearing landlords to the position of leadership in the popular anti-imperialist tumult. Following a few dispossessed princes and chiefs operating at the helm of the revolt, some *Zamindars*, *Jagirdars*, *Talukdars* and the like also supplied its leadership at the local level. It was not the number of the participants (not many actively participated in the rising) but the antipathy they generally felt towards the Company raj, and the discontent they shared among themselves as a class, actually mattered the most. Despite the social contradiction with the landlords and persons of their ilk, the rebellious commonalty (peasants in the main) had little alternative to accepting them – even if reluctantly – as leaders of the struggle against the British in 1857-58. Since the common man, woman and the mass of the people were not in a position at that semi-medieval circumstances to throw up a vibrant leadership of their own (the capability for which they did reveal once in a while during the great revolt), and also as the forward-looking, dynamic and ideologically-motivated middle class had not yet emerged, they had to do with, or make the best use of what was available to them – the traditional, status-quoist landlord leadership. Had the rebels succeeded in overthrowing the Company raj under their customary aristocratic leaders – and it could by no means be ruled out – would Hindustan then have been relapsed to the later Mughal days, from colonialism back to feudalism? It did not happen that way, and the British succeeded in winning India once again to themselves, subjecting the defeated rebels to terrible repressions and treating the commoners with utmost racial abuses. Ironically, out of all rebel reverses, and amidst the ashes of destruction and death, rose up again the irrepressible princes, *rajas* and landlords who returned to their domineering exploitative ways in the countryside. They, however, survived not really on their own, but on account primarily of a dramatic change in the over-all British perception of them, and also of the governance of India. The change was

brought about by the fearful British experience of facing a massive upsurge of people with a feudal lining on its crest. They had come to realise the grave danger that the disaffected multitudes could pose to their authority, and therefore, they began living in constant fear of fresh popular outbreaks. The only way out of this alarmist psychotic situation, they felt, was to show the white flag to the feudal elements, or those whom the rebellious peasantry seemed habitually to be following, despite the conflict of interests. Discarding the anti-feudalism of the recent past, and befriending the Indian Chiefs and landlords of diverse denominations by restoring them to their vantage position, were believed together to be the British empire's greatest guarantee against internal insecurities, and also the surest way to keep the traditional India under full control. The drastic change of the British mind in respect of their Indian possessions was put into great effect without any loss of time, and had been solemnly affirmed in the Queen Empress's Proclamation of 1 November 1858.

Consequent to the crisis of 1857-58, when the British authorities decided to take over the entire administration of India into their hands from those of the East India Company, it was incumbent on them to state publicly the basic changes that such momentous development must give effect to. The statement was contained in Queen (Empress for India) Victoria's Proclamation, and it emphasized upon the British resolve hereafter to compromise with the feudal forces in India, to commit themselves to safeguarding and furtherance of interests of the landed aristocracy and landlords of various varieties. "We know and respect the feelings of attachment with which the natives of India regarded the land inherited from their ancestors", the Proclamation announced, and then ran on to pledge the Government solemnly "to protect them in all rights connected therewith", and to pay "due regard to the ancient rights, usages and customs in India". It clearly signified the Government's giving up the Utilitarian stand against feudalism, as well as the liberalist dream of setting India on the capitalist path. Instead it showed the British willingness to share India's total social surplus with the feudal and landlordist contingent (limiting disproportionately of course, the latter's share) and buy some sense of internal security.

Landlordism not only was resuscitated in India by the Proclamation of 1858, it actually flourished under the British Raj's protection almost unobstrusively – without much opposition – till at least 1920. The landlords in effect turned out to be the junior partners of the imperialists in India between 1858 and 1920, and exercised mastery over the rural sector with their elaborate economic and social leverages, and a certain decisive presence in the corridors of power. The landlord-dominated British Indian Association (1851-1876), for example, was accorded by the British a vital share in the governance of the country through the nomination of its leaders to the Viceroy's Council and to the Bengal Legislative Council. The numerical strength of landlords also increased in leaps and bounds, and a considerable number was being continually added to their variegated rank over the vast stretches of the *Zamindari* territories, such as the whole of Bengal Presidency and part of the Madras Presidency, as well as in the *Jagirdari* and *Talukdari* regions of the North-Western Provinces, and in the enormous areas under the *Raiyatwari* and *Mahalwari* systems like most of the Madras and whole of the Bombay Presidencies, practically all of the North-Western Provinces and Punjab (under the village proprietary arrangement). The substantial and well-to-do tenants in all these places went very aggressively over the years for the

acquisition of land, in addition to the originally assigned plots of their own. It was more a kind of land-grabbing than land acquiring, and it had been effected through various questionable means like surreptitiously bringing waste and forest lands into cultivation, encroaching into the village common lands (say, for grazing, holding fairs, celebrating communitarian religious and socio-cultural occasions etc.), exercising pressure on the poor *raiyats* and buying their lands from distress sales, manipulating land records with the help of the *Patwaris* and forcing the poor peasants to part with the land they had mortgaged to their rich neighbours for obtaining ready loans in cash and crops. The neo-landlords in the non-*Zamindari* parts of the country had in fact been offering loans to the needy cultivators and acting as their supplementary rural credit suppliers, over and above the main providers – the professional moneylenders or *mahajans*. It was the *majajans* or *sahukars* who created havoc in the Bombay-Deccan by taking full advantage there of the rural indebtedness, charging excessive interest on the peasant-borrowing, falsifying records of loans and mortgages, and enforcing the sale of debtors' land and property for re-payment. All these led eventually in 1875 to violent outbursts of peasant protests, widespread attacks on the moneylenders' person and property and destruction of their court papers and land records.

Along with the emergence of the neo-landlords, another important category of substantial landlordist tenants were making their presence strongly felt during 1858-1920 in many parts of the country, especially in the *Zamindari* areas. Such substantial tenants (*Jotedars*) would persuade the landlords to giving them more land over and above their own, if necessary on lease, and arrange for cultivating these through the age-old sharecropping system. Under the yearly sharecropping arrangement the cultivator (*adhiar*) – a sub-tenant or under-tenant – was called upon to raise crops on his own in the *Jotedar's* additionally tenanted land and share the harvested crops, usually in two equal halves with the *Jotedar* or the tenant-landlord, paying him thus a clear 50 per cent produce-rent. Apart from obtaining such high extraction of rent (perhaps the highest), the *Jotedar* enjoyed the privilege of changing or throwing out his *adhiar* if another cultivator offered in the following year more *nazarana* to replace him. These ejectments were common in respect not only of the under-tenants, but also of the tenants-at-will or those tenants who lacked occupational rights over their assigned plots. The *Zamindars, Talukdars* and all other emergent neo-landlords (including *Deshmukhs, Deshpandes, Mirasdars* etc.) all over the country periodically evicted *raiyats* from their fields for extracting higher amount of either *nazarana* or rent from them. Over and above these regular evictions, the landlords unfailingly subjected the cultivating peasants to all kinds of irregular forced levies, such as their contributing to the landlords on the occasions of births, deaths, marriages and various other social and religious family functions. The levying of the landlords' irregular imposts were reported to have been of about 25 to 30 kinds, but none had been more demanding and distractingly damaging (especially during the agricultural seasons) than the systematic extraction of forced labour (*begaar*) from the peasants and their dependents. Enforced labour without payment for working in the landlord's field, his household and in any of his pet private projects, be it digging a pond, renovating a temple, repairing a road within the estate, or constructing the living quarters, was rampant and included even the poor peasant women's putting up with his sexual advances.

28.5 LANDLORDS AND EARLY NATIONALISTS

The landlords' economic and social exploitation of the *raiyats* was not only condoned by the Colonial State, but also strongly backed up by all its agencies, reducing the peasantry as a whole to a state of utter helplessness. The agencies were the local and village officials, the police in the localities and the sub-divisional and district courts, standing protectively behind the landlords, who manipulated records, refused rent-receipts to tenants and used *lathials* against them at will and at random. Although the Western educated Indian middle classes – the widely awakened future leaders of the country – did take note of the prevailing plights of the *raiyats* and sympathise with their hard and sad lot, they were reluctant altogether to go against the landlords, or to curb landlordism in any way. Despite the early nationalists like G.V. Joshi's concern for the distress that landlordism had caused to the *raiyats* in the *Zamindari* area, and causing simultaneously to them in the *Raiyatwari* areas, the pioneer leaders of the Indian National Congress not only not opposed the landlords, but actually went to the extent of extolling their questionable operations. R.C. Dutt, for example, was convinced that the Bengal *Zamindars* had charged "fair and moderate rent", and that they had succeeded in securing "the prosperity and happiness" of the people of the Bengal Presidency. The Congress's reluctance to oppose the Indian landlords was perhaps on account of its looking up to them for financial and political support, apart from a few of its leaders' having strong landlordist connections. As a very rich section of Indian society, in addition to the growing category of business and industrial magnates, the landlords could facilitate the onward march of the Congress with their position of local power and monetary contribution. There were promoters of the Congress among the landlords, and some of them also distinguished themselves as public men – as connoisseurs of arts and literatures, patrons of social and educational endeavours – without of course, going hardly ever against the grain of their exploitative, extortionist class character. A public-spirited and enlightened *Zamindar* like Joykrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara, Bengal, had always been under his skin a ruthless landlord, involved in money-lending, grain-trading and purchasing of encumbered estates. (Sunil Sen, *Peasant Movement in India*, p. 49). With the British Raj thus standing solidly behind the landlords, and the nationalists failing to offer a protective hand, the peasantry had meekly suffered, and resisted when it became absolutely insufferable. Since they were unorganised, bereft of any formation of their own, largely leaderless, and also rudderless because of their not imbibing any ideology, the peasant resistance to landlordism was bound to be sporadic, spasmodic and spontaneous. Spontaneity could hardly be any guarantee of success, and the occasional outbursts between 1858 and 1920 failed to make any significant headway.

Among the such notable peasant unrest over the *Zamindari* extractions and ejectments were the peasant movements in Serajganj (Pabna), Bengal, in 1872-73, the Moplah peasants' rising in Malabar against the oppressions of landlords (*Jenmis*)-officials-*mahajans* combine in 1873 (but lingeringly till 1896), the tribal peasants' (including the Rumpas', Santals' and Mundas') risings in the hills against the exploitative landlords and *Dikus* (*mahajans* and traders) and the ham-handed British authorities in Visakhapatnam Agency, western Bengal and southern Bihar intermittently between 1871 and 1900. There were also the Bogra, Mymensing, Dacca and Hooghly kisans' agitation against the steep *Zamindari* rent enhancements

in Bengal by fits and starts from 1870 to 1885; the anti-*Jotedari* agitation of the sharecroppers in Bagerhat (Khulna), Bengal, in 1907 and the indigo cultivators' rising against the landlordist oppression of the planters under British cover in 1908 in Champaran, Bihar. Numerous other similarly unfinished landlord-*raiyat* conflicts were strewn over the northern, southern, central and western parts of the country.

28.6 LANDLORDS AND THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT DURING THE 1920s AND 1930s

The landlords' luck in weathering the storm of peasant protest, of course with the British backing, seemed to be running out from 1920-22 when there was a dramatic turn towards vibrant mass politics. It was in 1920-22 that Gandhiji succeeded in bringing the Congress out of its elitist confines, and steering it to lead the people at large in the Non-Cooperation movement against the British authorities. Peasants naturally were enlisted in this massive anti-imperialist joint front and played a significant role in the national struggle for independence. Once aroused to battle for freedom from the colonial rule, they felt encouraged to fight for freeing themselves from the landlordist clutches. The peasantry waged simultaneously the anti-British and the anti-landlord struggles and combined the "no-tax" slogan with the "no-rent" clarion call. The "no-tax" agitation, initiated by Gandhiji himself as early as 1917 in Champaran (Bihar) and in Kaira (Gujarat), was exemplified explosively in Bardoli (Gujarat) in 1922, in Guntur (in Madras Presidency) in the early 1920s and in Tipperah, Mymensingh, Rajsahi and Dinajpur (Bengal), at the Wahabi instance, in 1920-22. Additionally the Koya peasants under Alluri Sitaram Raju fought for their forest rights in Madras Presidency in 1922, and the tenantry opposed unitedly the imposition of *Chowkidari* tax in north Bihar in 1920-21, against the collection of Union Board tax in Contai, Midnapore (Bengal), in 1921 and against a rise in revenue rates in East and West Godavari (Madras Presidency) in 1927. The instances of anti-imperialist "no-tax" activities coincided with the opening of the floodgates of anti-landlordist "no-rent" campaigns throughout the 1920s, i.e. of the *adhiars* against the *Jotedars* in Jalpaiguri and the 24 Parganas (Bengal) in 1920, of the Muslim Moplah peasants against the Brahmin *Jenmis* (Malabar) in 1921, of the tenants against the extortionist landlords in Cossimbazar, Tamluk and Contai (Bengal) in 1921, against the Midnapore *Zamindari* Company (Bengal) in 1922. To add to these examples, one must include the peasants' resolute "no-rent" confrontation with "the barons of Oudh" (the United Provinces) under Baba Ram Chandra and an young Jawaharlal Nehru in 1921, and its spreading like wild-fire to Rae Bareli, Fyzabad and Sultanpur, and the extension thereafter to Hardoi, Barabanki, Lucknow and Sitapur (Eka movement) in 1921-22.

Infinitely more than the Government's discomfiture over the "no-tax", the landlords' nervousness in the face of "no-rent" in the early 1920s bordered almost on panic. The landlords found it difficult to control the peasant "no-renters", and they were able somehow to save their skin with the help of the lathi-wielding retinues, the use of the police force, the strong support of the local bureaucracy and the sympathetic hearing of the lower courts of law, who went by the gospel of rent-receipts (often forgotten wilfully to be issued to the tenants). But what reassured the landlords most was the Congress ambivalence towards the "no-rent" campaigns, and its apparent landlord-friendly disposition throughout the

1920s and early 1930s, despite the anti-landlordism of some young Congress activists like Jawaharlal. As early as February 1922 when the "no-tax" move in Bardoli taluka (Gujarat) against the Government was being made, the Congress Working Committee under the Gandhian leadership warned the *raiyats* that "withholding rent payment to the Zamindars is contrary to the Congress resolution and injurious to the best interests of the country" (Sunil Sen, *Peasant Movement in India*, p.33). The principle of the resolution was scrupulously observed in the famous Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928 against the payment of revenue to the Government. It also dissuaded hundreds of the Congress followers of Jawaharlal Nehru and Baba Ram Chandra from turning the anti-Government "no-tax" campaign in the U.P. into an anti-landlord "no-rent" campaign in 1930. Gandhiji disapproved of the peasant militancy against the landlords and their non-payment of rent, and in his manifesto to the *kisans* issued in May 1931 he asked the tenant "to pay as early as possible all the rent he can" and expected him and his depressed counterparts to be "treated liberally by the landlords" (Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh*, pp. 104-5). However, despite the discouragement of the Congress High Command and the unleashing of Government repression (both Jawaharlal and Baba Ram Chandra were arrested), the payment of rent to the landlords came practically to a standstill by the end of 1931 in Rae Bareli, Etawah, Kanpur, Unnao and Allahabad. The younger radical elements in the national movement throughout the 1930s were becoming increasingly aware of the parasitical, exploitative character of the landlords, and turning resolutely against them. The left Congressites, who organised themselves into a Congress Socialist party in 1934, were joined in their opposition to the landlords by the Communist Party of India – already in existence from the mid-1920s. Together they started upholding the cause of the peasant masses, demanding land to the tiller, and advocating even the abolition of landordism. However, the leftists had not been able in the mid-1930s to persuade the Congress leadership to endorse their anti-landlordism, and had failed to get such slogans as "land to the tiller" or "abolish Zamindari" included in the agrarian programme that the Congress adopted in its Faizpur session in December 1936. The landlords did thus escape in all parts of the country in the late 1930s, especially in the Congress-ruled provinces under Provincial Autonomy, the direct threat to their very existence. But they could not avoid hereafter from facing the persistent Congress demand for substantial curtailment of their dominance through the reduction of rent, abolition of irregular levies and forced labour, annulment of arrears of rent and fixity of tenure of all tenants.

28.7 CONGRESS, THE LEFT AND THE POSITION OF LANDLORDS

Encouraged by the Congress agrarian programme, guided by the left forces – who combined the various locally grown kisan organisations (Andhra Zamindari Ryot Association, Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, Karshaka Sangham, Kisan Sangh, Workers and Peasants Party, Krishak Samiti etc.) into a nation-wide All India Kisan Sabha in 1936 – and forced by the mounting post-Depression economic pressure, a series of anti-landlord disturbances broke out all over India. They included agitations of farm-hands against the *Mirasdars* in Tanjore (1938); of bonded labourers and sharecroppers against the *Istimrardars* in Ajmer-Merwara, Rajasthan, and Haris against the *Jagirdars* in Sind (1938-39); of *Bargadars* against the *Jotedars* in Bengal (1939); of tenants-at-will against the

Zamindari evictions in Ghalla Dher, Mardan, N.W.F.P. (1938); of *Asami-Shikmidars* over *Sir* lands in the U.P. (1938); of *Bakasht* peasants against the landlords in Bihar (1937-39); of all tenants against the *Biswedars* in Patiala and *Khotears* in Maharashtra (1939). There were also anti-landlord agitations in Malabar and Kasargad (1939), as well as in Nellore and Visakhapatnam (1938-39) and at Munagala in Krishna district (1939). Even then, the worsening of their existential crisis had not pushed the landlords to the brink of total collapse mainly because of the extraneous circumstances, namely, the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-45), and India's being dragged into it in favour of the British-led Allied Powers. Since the war meant a state of emergency, and emergency called for sterner governance, the British Raj withheld all traces of constitutionalism and started ruling India through the draconian Defence of India Rules. The illegalisation of public protest and agitation under the D.I.R. came to the rescue of the landlords, and so did the numbing effect of the nationalist controversy over supporting or opposing Britain in the war. The outcome was the combative "Quit India" movement against the Raj on the one land and the supportive "People's War" line on the other, both contributing to the restraint on the *kisan's* rising temper in the country between 1939 and 1945. The breathing space the war situation thus provided for the landlords went further in their favour when the Government launched a War Fund for meeting its military expenses. The Fund enabled the landed magnates to contribute richly to the British war-efforts and curry their protectors' favour. But, despite all this, the landlords were practically under siege during the war period and the anti-landlord peasant resentment expressed itself sporadically throughout. Its intensity could hardly be guessed without some reference to such agitations as the anti-*Dhaniama* in Surat and Broach (South Gujarat), 1940; anti-*Mirasdar* in Trichinopoly (Madras), 1940; anti-*Malik* in Purnea (Bihar), 1940-41; anti-*Jotedar* in most parts of Bengal, 1940-44; anti-landlordist crop-sharing in Patiala (Punjab), early 1940s; anti-eviction (*Sir* lands) in Gorakhpur and Benares (the U.P.), 1940-41; anti-ejectment (*Bakasht* lands) in most of Bihar, 1941-45; anti-*Zamindari* in Durg (C.P. and Berar) and Surma Valley (Assam), 1940; and also in Ganjam (Orissa), Krishna district and Visakhaptnam (Andhra, Madras) 1940, in North Malabar, 1940-41, and in Thana, Nasik and Kolaba (Maharashtra), 1941.

Once the war ended in 1945, and the Government's iron grip relaxed a bit, the landlords' vulnerability *vis-a-vis* the tenants and their mobilisers, increased manifold. The left-wing kisan agitators, who had always been challenging feudalism – the epitome rural expropriation and oppression – now readied themselves for dealing a death blow to the landlordist system. In the winter of 1945 the All India Kisan Sabha demanded the abolition of landlordism, and wanted it to be done – contrary to the prevailing nationalist opinion – "without compensation". About this time the Congress also veered round the leftist position on the issue, but favoured abolition "with compensation" in its Election Manifesto of 1946. Whether it was "with" or "without" compensation – the making up of the landlords' loss of land, or refusing to do so to even up their age-old malpractices – the fate of the landlords seemed to have been sealed on the eve of the country's independence and in its aftermath. It could not have been otherwise in the light of the explosive situation that had rapidly been developing in the Indian countryside. Peasant militancy against the landlord-Government alliance started taking violent forms, notably in Mannargudi (Tanjore), 1944-45; in the peasants' clashing with the landlords over the tilling of lands in Shovana *Zamindari* (Khulna), 1945; in the peasants' forcibly cultivating and harvesting

Bakasht lands in many parts of Bihar, 1945-46; in the Worli peasants' fighting the joint front of moneylenders, landlords and police in Thana, 1945-46; in the *Punam* cultivators' arming themselves against the landlord-friendly Malabar Special Police in North Malabar, 1946-47.

A very high level of peasant militancy was making its distinctive presence felt even in 1946 when the landless went the proletarian insurrectionary way in Travancore (Punnapra-Vayalar). It was followed in the *Tebhaga* movement (Bengal) in 1947 by the *Bargadars'* seizing the crop-shares of the *Jotedars*, breaking open the landlords' granaries and snatching away their stocks of grains. The rebellious peasants' seizing of the landlords' crops soon graduated to their seizure of the landlords' lands in Telengana in 1947-48 and to the highest stage of peasant struggle – the distribution of the seized lands among the landless. Time in fact was running out for the Congress leaders who were to monopolise governance in the newly independent India, and who had either to take urgent steps for the abolition of landlordism or to confront widespread peasant risings all over the country – to the utter detriment of its independence and development. Although the Bihar *Zamindari* legislation was introduced in the provincial legislature as early as 1947, the model piece of anti-*Zamindari* legislation was fashioned only after the U.P. *Zamindari* Abolition Committee Report of 1948. A number of provincial Governments (including Bihar who redrafted its Bill) such as those of Madras, Assam, Bombay and the C.P. and Berar, over and above Bihar and the U.P., adopted a similar pattern in their respective legislative exercise in 1949. The landlords in all parts of the country in response waged a last-ditch battle for their very existence in the courts of law, harping on the Government's violation of their fundamental right to property, and on the authorities' incumbency to provide them with "adequate" compensation. Since they were not doing too badly on the legal front (the Patna High Court apparently upheld their position in 1950), the Congress Government at the centre had to pass consecutive constitutional amendments in 1951 and 1954, by which the charge of flouting any fundamental right or of offering "insufficient" compensation (in respect of the *Zamindari* abolition) were not permitted to be brought before the courts. This enabled most of the states to circumvent the arduous legal proceedings and to carry out the *Zamindari* abolition with compensation (as recommended by the state legislatures) by 1956. With the abolition of *Zamindari*, certainly on the surface, a very prolonged phase of history had ended which had meant the unearned profiteering and parasitic prodigality, and exploitation, repression and injustice. The landlords thus seemed dramatically to have exited from the agrarian scene of the country, but landordism somehow surreptitiously survived, squeezed out its own sustenance and continued to remain a debilitating burden on the Indian people.

28.8 SUMMARY

The landlords were a force to be reckoned with until the middle of the 19th century, despite the attempts by the colonial administration to undermine their powers. The failure of the revolt of 1857, however, dramatically changed their position. Although no longer independently powerful vis-à-vis the state, the landlords gained enormously as the colonial government decided to prop them as a bulwark against peasant rebellions. Over the period, the landlords served as one of the most important support of the colonial state.

The nationalist movement maintained an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the landlords. On the one hand, it opposed their exploitation and oppression of the peasants. On the other hand, it did not wish to antagonise them in supposedly larger interests of the nation. Nevertheless, some of its leaders led significant peasant movements in various parts of the country. The intensifying peasant movements all over the country against the landlords were being led by the left, the nationalists and independent peasant leaders. This seriously undermined their position and convinced all the concerned forces that landlordism should be abolished with or without compensation.

28.9 EXERCISES

1) How did the failure of the Revolt of 1857 transform the position of the landlords?

2) Discuss the relationship between the nationalists and the landlords during the 1920s and 1930s.

3) In what ways did the militant peasant movements help in undermining the position of the landlords?

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Block

7

NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL GROUPS-II

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National Movement and Women **5**

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National Movement and the Minorities **25**

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BLOCK 7 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND SOCIAL GROUPS-II

Introduction

In this Block, we will discuss the ways in which the nationalist movement related to three important social groups in colonial India—women, Dalits and minorities, particularly the Muslims. Women formed a significant part of the national movement during the twentieth century. The participation of women in nationalist movement occurred with the growth of feminism in India. Increasing education among women also played an important role in inculcating nationalist consciousness. Many women's associations were formed in different parts of India which strongly took up women's issues, the most important political demand being right to vote. Many of these associations were influenced by and were closely allied with nationalist politics. Gandhian politics played a key role in bringing a large number of women in the national movement. Women from all walks of life joined the movement and some of them became quite prominent leaders. Many women also actively participated in the revolutionary and left movements. **Unit 29** will familiarise you with women's role in national movement.

The incorporation of Dalits as a group in the nationalist movement was again a challenging task. The conscious Dalit intelligentsia demanded that their demand for social equality be given equal weight as the demand for national freedom. The nationalist leaders, on the other hand, regarded the task of national liberation as primary, although they did consider social equality as an important goal. Removal of untouchability was put on the national agenda to be pursued by the Congress since 1917, and during the early 1930s, Gandhi vigorously launched an anti-untouchability movement. One of the important achievements of the nationalist leadership was to bring around the Dalit leaders in support of joint electorate in the national interests eschewing their demand for separate electorate. The Poona Pact contained reservation of seats for the Dalits within the frame of joint electorate. On the whole, however, Congress did not succeed in fully convincing the Dalit leaders, particularly Ambedkar, about its sincerity in solving the problems of the Dalits. **Unit 30** deals with these issues.

While the national movement was quite successful in making the women's presence public and in largely allaying the fears of the Dalit intelligentsia, its relationship with the Muslim minority was marked by a certain degree of failure. In the early years of the Congress, there was a lukewarm response of the Muslim leaders towards it. The formation of the Muslim League and subsequent provision of separate electorate for the Muslims in the Morley-Minto Reforms were in keeping with the British policy of creating a wedge between the Hindus and Muslims. The close relationship between Gandhi and Congress, on the one hand, and the Muslim leaders on the other during the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements was rather short-lived. The growing intensity of communal discord during the 1920s disrupted the spectacular harmony which had marked the period

from Lucknow Pact in 1915 to the withdrawal of Non-cooperation in 1922. Situation became worse during the 1930s, and during the 1940s an irreparable situation arose with the separatist politics of the Muslim League gaining large ground among the Muslims. It was the worst period of the relationship of the Congress with the Muslim minority. Congress was unable to prevent either the communal riots or the partition of the country. In **Unit 31**, we will discuss these problems in detail.

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UNIT 29 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND WOMEN*

Structure

29.1 Introduction

29.2 Women Leaders of the National Movement

29.3 Mahila Samitis (Women Associations)

29.4 Mobilisation of Women in the Gandhian Phase

29.5 The Civil Disobedience Movement

29.6 The Quit India Movement

29.7 Women in Jail

29.8 Women in the Revolutionary and Left Movements

29.9 Summary

29.10 Exercises

29.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will discuss the role of women in the national movement. Women's role in history is not easy to document. Much has been written about the invisibility of women in mainstream historical accounts. The task of filling in the gaps, of putting women into the narrative, has been an ongoing one for the past few decades. Autobiographies, personal diaries and other writings by women in journals have played a major role in this reconstruction. Any account of women's role in the Indian National Movement too, would have to rely heavily on such sources. For the rest, private papers, published and unpublished, archival records, newspapers also contain references to women's activities. They have to be carefully scrutinised to look for any mention of women's participation and occasionally they have yielded significant results.

29.2 WOMEN LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

There is no doubt that women participated in the Indian anti-imperialist struggle in large numbers. If we were to recall the names of women leaders in our national movement, we will find that the list is a very long one. Starting with Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mridula Sarabhai at the national level, we may go on to provincial level leaders like Annie Mascarene and A.V. Kuttimaluamma in Kerala, Durgabai Deshmukh in Madras Presidency, Rameshwari Nehru and Bi Amman in U.P., Satyawati Devi and Subhadra Joshi in Delhi, Hansa Mehta and Usha Mehta in Bombay and several others. In fact, such is the nature of our nationalist movement that it is very difficult to distinguish between regional level and all-India level leaders. Many women began at the local level and went on to become players in the nationalist

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centre stage. Besides all these Indian women, there were also Irish women like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who brought their own knowledge of the Irish experience of British exploitation to bear on India.

The growth of feminism in India and women's participation in the Indian Nationalist Movement were part of the same process. As Geraldine Heng, the Singaporean academic based in the US, has noted: "feminist movements in the Third World have almost always grown out of the same historical soil and at a similar moment, as nationalism." Moreover, as the first wave of feminism swept America and Europe, it had its impact on India too. Women in different parts of the world were asking for the vote for women, and this became the rallying cry in India as well. Irish women like Margaret Cousins helped the Indian women to demand representation in the limited constitutional reforms being provided as early as 1917. That was the year in which the Indian Women's Association was formed, primarily with the intention of sending a delegation to Edwin Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India. The delegation asked for votes for women in the new constitutional reforms which would finally take the shape of the 1919 Government of India Act, popularly known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

But let us first go back to the beginning of the twentieth century – a very significant period, not just because of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal with its repercussions in other parts of the country, but also because it was the time when girls' schools and ladies' clubs mushroomed in different parts of the country. In Delhi, the Indraprastha Girls' School was set up at this time on the outskirts of the Jama Masjid, in the *haveli* of one of the businessmen of Chandni Chowk, Rai Balkrishan Das. In the UP, Sayyid Karamat Husain was busy setting up a whole network of girls' schools from Aligarh to Allahabad. There is a close relationship between women's increased access to education and their nationalist consciousness. As will be shown later, it was on the journey to school and back, or in the classroom, that many women had their first initiation into the nationalist movement. On the other hand there were several illiterate women who also participated in the movement. In the course of their activity, they closely interacted with educated fellow nationalists, and were able to access education in a whole variety of unconventional ways. Quite often it would be within the confines of the jail barracks. The relationship between education and empowerment was being understood by many women across the length and breadth of the country by the early twentieth century.

29.3 MAHILA SAMITIS (WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS)

The early twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of many city and town-based women's associations. Unlike the girls' schools mentioned above, these were initiated by women themselves. It was as if there was something in the air at that time which made women want to reach out to each other, to do activities together and to broaden their mental and physical horizons.

In the light of the Swadeshi agitation, women's associations like the Mahila Shilpa Samiti and the Lakshmir Bhandar were set up by the nieces of Rabindranath Tagore, Hironmoyee Devi and Sarla Devi. The Hitashini Sabha, a women's group, organised an exhibition of Swadeshi goods in 1907. Alongside with the

establishment of these women's organisations, women's journals like the *Bharat-Mahila* were also becoming extremely popular. Kumudini Mitra wrote in one of the issues that if the Indians rejected British goods in large quantities, then there would be a great upheaval in England and that would force the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, to revoke Partition.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, in her autobiography titled *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces*, describes how, in her home town, Mangalore, her own mother Girijabai set up a Mahila Sabha around 1911 to bring women together to discuss their problems and seek ways of resolving them. Even earlier, she would visit homes and read out newspapers to women. Slowly, the activities of the Mahila Sabha expanded – women were encouraged to read books, journals and newspapers from Girijabai's own personal collection. Kamaladevi goes on to add: "the discussions were later lightened by music, vocal or instrumental. Later, outdoor games such as badminton were added..."

Two years before Girijabai set up her Mahila Sabha in Mangalore, Rameshwari Nehru, wife of a cousin of Jawaharlal Nehru, was creating a similar organisation in Allahabad. Known as the Prayag Mahila Samiti, it tried to draw the women of Allahabad out of their homes to discuss political issues. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, has this rather evocative description of one of the meetings of the Samiti in 1917. The issue that was being discussed was the plight of Indians in South Africa:

'The meeting itself was, I imagine, unique for the time. It took consistent and patient efforts for many days to persuade women to leave their homes for one afternoon and go out to hear other women speak. Outings at that time were confined to specific social occasions when one dressed up in one's best and could look forward to a good meal, and this new idea was not appreciated. South Africa was very far away – it was a pity Indians were being discriminated against, but what good could result by some women getting together and talking about it in Allahabad? A packed hall finally rewarded the efforts of the organisers and the meeting was hailed by the newspapers next morning as a great step forward in arousing the social conscience of the women of the Uttar Pradesh! My own part had been confined mostly to serving water and in trying to keep crying babies quiet, but I had a feeling of participation in the cause and felt happy.' (*The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 61-62.)

Rameshwari Nehru had also set up a women's journal at this time: the *Stree Darpan*, which was extremely popular with the Hindi reading public. It had an interesting mix of political coverage of national and international issues, short stories, poems and other prose pieces. By the 1930s, there were several other Hindi journals, such as *Madhuri*, which had also made an appearance. We have given just one example here: if we were to look at other parts of the country, such as Andhra Pradesh, Bengal and Maharashtra, we will see similar processes at work.

During the 1920s, the issue of votes for women was debated in the Provincial Legislative Councils and ultimately, by the mid-1920s, all the Legislative Councils, from the more progressive Madras Legislative Council to the more conservative UP Legislative Council, had given their assent to the idea of women's suffrage and women's representation. It is worth noting that the British

Government, when petitioned on the matter, had avoided taking a decision (possibly because in England, despite the spirited campaign launched by the Suffragettes, women still did not have the vote) They had suggested that the newly-constituted Legislative Councils, under the 1919 Government of India Act, which had an Indian majority for the first time, should debate the matter and arrive at a decision. Fortunately for the women, these councils voted in their favour.

29.4 MOBILISATION OF WOMEN IN THE GANDHIAN PHASE

While these developments facilitated the growth of the women's movement in India and their active involvement in public life, it was the new direction and focus given to the Indian National Movement by Mahatma Gandhi that enabled them to come out of their homes. Vina Majumdar, the doyen of women's studies in India, has referred to Gandhi's "revolutionary approach to women's role in society and their personal dignity as individuals". Madhu Kishwar, another well-known feminist scholar and activist, develops this theme further. She explains that it was in the course of the Gandhian movement that the single woman acquired a sense of dignity and came to be respected for her political work. Women like Mridula Sarabhai, who chose to remain unmarried, could actually make this choice in the context of the Gandhian movement, where giving up one's personal life for the cause and opting out of marriage were seen as noble deeds. Such women were not pitied because they had not found husbands. Their actions in the political sphere were appreciated. Mridula Sarabhai was a trusted lieutenant of Mahatma Gandhi and was often sent out by him to various places to assess the political situation and even control communal riots. Aparna Basu's biographical account of Mridula Sarabhai gives us insights into the life of this remarkable woman. Another example is that of Sucheta Kripalani, who actively participated in the movement and was a true Gandhian. In her 'Unfinished Autobiography', she wrote:

"I saw this [women being given political responsibilities] again and again during his historic tour in Noakhali. I remember once he decided to send young Abha out to work alone in a difficult village. I was myself afraid. I pleaded with Gandhiji that she was too young to go to work in such a village where there was intense bitterness between the Hindus and the Muslims. But he was firm in his decision and said: "Abha shall go. Nobody dare touch a hair on her head and she is bound to succeed in her mission." He proved to be correct."

Women were therefore, not mere add-ons to the Gandhian movement, but were an important part of it. In fact, when explaining his strategy of satygraha and how it worked, Mahatma Gandhi had often expressed the view that he felt women would understand the method better. Satyagraha required a great deal of patience and forbearance, as well as moral courage. Gandhiji felt that most women in India had these qualities.

Women's participation in the first major Gandhian movement, the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-22, was limited but there were some important developments. The Khilafat Movement in the U.P. was marked by the energetic efforts of Bi Amman, the mother of the Ali Brothers, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali. Bi Amman was the popular name by which she

was known. Her actual name was Abadi Bano Begum. A courageous woman who did not allow patriarchy and the *pardah* to come in her way, she took to active politics around 1914, when her sons were in jail, because she felt that the cause must not suffer. Despite her age – she was over sixty by then – she toured the Punjab, Bombay, the U.P. and Bihar during the Khilafat Movement, addressing several meetings and collecting large sums of money for the Movement. She would throw aside her *pardah* and address the gathering, asking women to come forward and participate in the Movement in large numbers. Her presence played a major role in attracting women to the public meetings held on the Khilafat issue.

Another important development was that women went to jail for the first time in the Non-Cooperation Movement. This was bound to happen, though Mahatma Gandhi was at first not at all in favour of women going to jail. But when the wife and sister of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das got arrested in Calcutta in 1921, Gandhiji had to revise his stand. He now began addressing women in different parts of the country, exhorting them to go to jail. "A yagna is incomplete without women taking part in it", he told the women of Gujarat.

He drew them more actively into the mainstream of politics, asking them to attend the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress, held at the end of 1921, in large numbers. The women of U.P. in particular responded to the appeal, setting forth from their distant homes, travelling third class to Ahmedabad, staying at Sabarmati Ashram and experiencing the rigours and austerities of Ashram life. Attending the Congress session, participating in the discussions and getting more deeply drawn into the spirit of non-co-operation were exhilarating experiences. Krishna Hutheesingh, the younger sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, has given us a rather vivid description of this journey in her autobiography titled "With No Regrets". Besides her, her elder sister, Sarup (later Vijayalakshmi Pandit) and her sister-in-law Kamala Nehru, there were other women like Begum Mohammad Ali, Begum Hasrat Mohani, Mrs. A.M. Khwaja and Uma Nehru attending this session of the Congress. From Punjab came Sarladevi Chaudharani, the niece of Rabindranath Tagore and from Gujarat there was Anusuya Sarabhai.

When they returned after the Congress session, their lives had been transformed. The Non-Cooperation Movement was at its peak, most of the leaders had been arrested. The women took upon themselves the responsibility of keeping the movement alive by holding meetings, often in defiance of prohibitory orders, addressing large crowds, usually for the first time in their lives, and if need be, even going to jail.

What emerges, then, from the pattern of women's participation in the politics of the 1920s is their being drawn into the movement, not in the first instance, but at one remove, i.e., after the arrest of their men folk. They were not cowed down by this punitive action of the Government. Instead, it strengthened their resolve to keep up the tempo of the movement and prevent it from dying out. The determined spirit of these women left the British authorities rather confused. What were they to do with these women? Should their actions be ignored or should they be arrested? If the latter course of action were to be adopted, would it cause further unrest? Very few women were arrested in the Khilafat- Non-cooperation Movement, and if they were, it was only for a very short period. Things were to change during the next mass movement, however.

In the course of the peasant movement in Awadh, which accompanied the Non-Co-operation Movement, women participated actively. Jaggi Devi, the wife of Baba Ramchandra, was an active figure. We also have some other names of peasant women who were part of the large crowds who gathered outside police stations to get their leaders released. The peasant historian, Kapil Kumar, in his article titled "Rural Women in Oudh 1917-1947" refers to women like Musammat Putta and Abhilakhi, who came into the peasant movement on their own and not at the initiative of their husbands. Sumitra Devi, on the other hand, had her husband and mother-in-law in the peasant movement.

29.5 THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-33 was undoubtedly a major landmark in women's participation in political activity. We begin with the historic Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi in March 1930. When he set out from his Sabarmati Ashram with his group of 78 volunteers, he declared that no women would be part of the Dandi March. This was extremely disappointing for women like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay who has given us this account of what she felt: "As batches for the first Satyagrahis were to be selected, I asked that women be included. I was told that Gandhiji did not want them as he had other programmes reserved for them. I was flabbergasted."

Kamaladevi rushed to Surat and then took a bus to Jambusar, where Gandhiji and his group of volunteers were expected to reach. She impressed upon Gandhiji the need to involve women in direct action during the Civil Disobedience Movement. After listening to her, Gandhiji finally held out a slip of paper on which he had written: "All may regard this as the words from me that all are free and those who are ready are expected to start mass civil disobedience regarding the Salt Law from April 6." Kamaladevi took this as the green signal from Gandhi for women's participation in mass direct action and this made it easier for the women's sections of the Seva Dals (volunteer organisations of the Congress) to issue directions and organise participation of women volunteers in all the programmes of Civil Disobedience. Women's meetings, processions, picketing of shops the making and selling of salt, all became generalised activities in all parts of the country. To quote Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay once again:

"The veil of centuries was torn asunder. Women, young and old, rich and poor came tumbling out in their hundreds and thousands, shaking off the traditional shackles that had held them so long.

"Voluntarily they went forward without a trace of fear or embarrassment. They stood at street corners with little packages of salt, crying out: "We have broken the Salt Law and we are free. Who will buy the salt of freedom? Don't you want the salt of freedom? Their cries never went unheeded. Every passerby stopped, slipped a coin into their hands and held out proudly a tiny pinch of salt." (Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, "The Struggle for Freedom" in *Women of India*, Publication Division, 1958, pp. 19-20.)

Quite often these activities took them to jail usually in rather unexpected ways. We have this rather delightful description from Munshi Premchand, the writer, of the arrest of his wife, Shivrani Devi, who was active in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Allahabad: "I saw her yesterday in prison and found her cheerful

as ever. She has left us all behind and I now appear smaller in my own eyes. She has gone up a hundred fold in my esteem. But until she comes and relieves me, I shall have to bear the burden of running the household." (From Amrit Rai, *Premchand: A Life* (Translated from the Hindi by Harish Trivedi), New Delhi, 1982, pp. 260-61.)

These words capture the mood of many a household where the women had gone to jail – pride mixed with dismay at the inconveniences that had to be borne. Manmohini Sahgal Zutshi in her autobiography recounts the story of a woman who found herself in the Lahore Jail. She had been arrested in the course of a meeting and this had infuriated her husband who had threatened not to take her back when she was released from jail. Manmohini and her mother Lado Rani Zutshi, a well known Congress leader from Lahore, spoke to the husband who explained that what irked him was not the fact of his wife being in jail – in fact he was proud of her for that – he was upset because she had not sought his permission before going to jail!

This was a time when gender equations were undergoing change – women were making their choice of husbands, they were even choosing not to marry or to move away from husbands with whom there were compatibility issues. For example, the Bengali Sucheta Majumdar met and married Jivat Kripalani, a Sindhi who was a close follower of Mahatma Gandhi. They not only had to reckon with opposition from their own families but from Mahatma Gandhi himself, who was opposed to the idea of J.B. Kripalani, his right hand man, getting distracted with household responsibilities. The couple finally convinced Mahatma Gandhi that even though they would marry, they would devote their entire lives to nationalist work and would not raise children. They remained true to their resolve until the very end. Another example was that of Jayaprakash Narayan and his wife Prabhavati. In this case, the marriage was a traditional one, but once again they resolved not to raise children and spent their lives often away from each other, pursuing their own preferred forms of political activity. Prabhavati spent a great deal of her time in the Gandhian ashram at Sevagram, while Jayaprakash was drawn more and more towards Congress Socialism. A third example is that of the Delhi-based Congress leader, Asaf Ali and his wife Aruna Ganguly from Allahabad. Aruna was marrying out of religion, and like Sucheta, had chosen a man who was much older than her. These unconventional marriages gave women a great deal of space and it is not surprising that at least two of the women mentioned above: Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali, became prominent leaders of the Congress. Both were extremely active in the underground campaign which sustained and gave a sense of direction to the Quit India Movement of 1942. As for women opting out of marriage due to incompatibility, we have Mahadevi Varma, the well-known poetess, who terminated an early marriage and went on to pursue a professional career even while being a staunch nationalist. The Communist leader, Hajra Begum, had been married to her cousin but soon found that she could not adjust to his ways. She left him and pursued her studies in England, in the course of which she met Z.A. Ahmed, whom she later married.

29.6 THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

If women came into their own in the 1930s, the 1942 Quit India Movement was one in which women's participation was even more significant. Interestingly, women understood the complexities of this movement very well. Since the major

Congress leaders had been put in jail in a pre-emptive strike by the British government, they realised that what was needed now was to evade arrest and many of them successfully managed to do so until almost the end of the movement. Women also took the initiative in a wide variety of ways – from producing pamphlets, to circulating underground literature, to running a Congress radio. Usha Mehta, along with Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Babubhai Khakar and Rammanohar Lohia set up the Freedom Radio in Bombay which successfully broadcast from 3rd September 1942 until 12 November of the same year. This was how she explained the background to the setting up of the Congress Radio:

"The leaders had told us to do all we could. We had been given specific instructions regarding the programme. So each one had to exert his or her own brain to find out the programme that would be suitable, that would be appropriate for the type of struggle that had been launched. There were some friends who thought in terms of violent means also. And there were some sabotage cases in Bombay. Some friends wanted to prepare bombs. There were others who thought in terms of derailments. But our group of friends thought that as far as possible we would try to be non-violent. Not that every one believed in non-violence as a creed, but in their opinion, as we had accepted the Mahatma's leadership, it was desirable for us to stick to non-violent means as far as possible. However, they did not like the methods which were ordinarily adopted, because they did not seem to be as effective as some of the other means. By studying the freedom movements of other countries, we found that, perhaps, a transmitter was the best way of spreading news regarding the movement, not merely in Bombay but all over India. At a time when the press was gagged and we had no control over the official transmitter (All-India Radio), we thought this would serve the purpose very well and, hence, we set out in search of a technical who could provide us with a transmitter."

The broadcasts were usually of 20 minutes to half an hour duration and would end with the Bande Mataram. They were extremely popular and people used to wait for the broadcasts. Usha Mehta's account of the ways in which they moved from place to place with their transmitters, often narrowly escaping detection, pre-empting the attempts by All India Radio to jam their frequency by jamming the AIR itself make fascinating reading.

In the Quit India Movement, there were women's processions even in such unlikely places as Bannu in the North West Frontier Province. Girl students were active in Meerut, parts of Assam, Sagar and Wardha in Madhya Pradesh and different parts of the Madras Presidency.

There is an amusing incident of how the women of Mahila Ashram, Wardha, decided to embarrass the District Magistrate. Shortly after the beginning of the Quit India Movement, it was time for the Raksha Bandhan festival, when sisters usually tie *rakhis* around the wrists of their brothers. The Mahila Ashram women decided to call upon the District Magistrate and tie *rakhis* on him. The DM fully realised what the consequences of this action could be. It would mean that he would become their brother, and how could a brother arrest his own sisters? On the other hand, it would be extremely awkward for him to refuse their request. What was he to do? When the women arrived at his home, he sent his wife to receive them and ply them with food and *sharbat*. When the women asked for the DM they were told by the wife that he was getting ready. After they had waited for a long time they suspected that something was wrong. They realised

that the DM had managed to escape through the back door, even as the wife was entertaining the women.

29.7 WOMEN IN JAIL

Women went to jail in large numbers both during the course of the Quit India Movement and the previous Civil Disobedience Movement. As we have explained earlier, these arrests often threw their domestic lives into disarray. However, for the women themselves, the jail came to signify a new world, the routine of which was quite different from the daily domestic grind. Here, they learnt to spin, sing nationalist songs, educate themselves, learn new languages and interact with women whom they would otherwise never have met in their lives. Many of the middle-class women had their first insights into the lives of 'criminal women' who had been convicted for murder and other serious offences. They learnt to empathise with them and bond with them as women. The 'murders', they realised, had often been committed by way of resisting patriarchal oppression. A drunken husband had been clubbed to death by the wife who had silently endured years of violence and humiliation. Such women in turn reacted to the political prisoners with curiosity and a certain amount of envy. The realised that the political prisoners were there only for a short period of time and would return to their normal lives after a year or two. There would be families waiting to receive them while their own lives were blighted forever. Even if their terms ended, who would accept a woman murderer back into their homes?

29.8 WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTIONARY AND LEFT MOVEMENTS

Until now we have concentrated on the Gandhian movement and women's participation in it. As we know, our nationalist movement had several other ideological strains besides the Gandhian one. From the 1920s, under the auspices of the HRA which later renamed itself as the HSRA, a strong revolutionary tradition developed over large parts of Northern India. This revolutionary movement set itself up as a counter to the non-violent Gandhian movement, which, it felt, would not work in India. It believed that individual assassinations, especially of top officials of the British Government would be more effective because that would paralyse the British Government and make them leave India. These revolutionary groups worked underground and the harsh life that they led made it extremely difficult for women to be part of it. In fact, as women like Prakashvati, the wife of Yashpal, have explained, the men themselves discouraged women from joining their movement. Yet, in Bengal, there were women revolutionary groups who formed physical culture clubs and secretly read banned revolutionary literature. The Chittagong Armoury Raid of 19 April 1930. Greatly excited women like Pritilata Wadedar and Kalpana Dutt who became more actively involved in revolutionary activities.

The late 1920s and thereafter witnessed the emergence of a viable Left alternative within the Indian Nationalist Movement. Many women chose to join the Communist Party, because of its more radical programme which appealed especially to the youth and also because the newly emergent Soviet Russia was making remarkable progress through collectivisation of agriculture and the Five Year Plans. Hajra Begum from Rampur, a small princely state in UP, explained

that she was not at all attracted by the Gandhian programme. Her ideological affinity with Communism was further strengthened when she went to England to study and got an opportunity to visit the Soviet Union. The group of students whom she interacted with in London—Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmed, K.M. Ashraf—were also similarly inclined. They all became the first Indian members of the CPGB: the Communist Party of Great Britain. They were instructed to return to India and work within the Indian National Congress (The Communist Party of India was under a ban at that time). Hajra Begum emerged as a labour leader, organising the railway coolies on Allahabad railway station. She was also a popular speaker at many student meetings during the 1930s.

In the course of the 1940s, the number of women who participated in the various subsidiary organisations of the Left, such as the Progressive Writers' Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association increased manifold. Rasheed Jahan, Ismat Chugtai, Rekha Jain and others made their mark in literature, theatre and music. All these cultural forms were used to mobilise the workers and the peasantry in different parts of India. This, combined with the very active role that women played in the Quit India Movement, indicates the extent to which women were becoming the "movers of history" by the 1940s.

29.9 SUMMARY

Women's participation in the Indian Nationalist Movement can be traced back to the Swadeshi Movement. The early decades of the twentieth century saw women's lives being transformed through education, formation of women's associations and increasing participation in political activity. The story of women's participation in India's freedom struggle is the story of making bold choices, finding themselves on the streets, inside jails and in legislatures, all of which empowered them in a whole variety of ways. The non-violent movement that gained India her freedom not only took women along but was dependent for its success on the active participation of women. At the same time, there were several other strands in the anti-imperialist movement, such as that of the revolutionaries, communists and other left groups. While the revolutionary movement offered little scope for women's participation, increasingly in the 1930s and 1940s, many women were being drawn towards socialist and communist ideas.

29.10 EXERCISES

1) Why was Gandhian method of mass mobilisation effective in bringing out women to public life?

2) Discuss the relationship between feminism and growth of national consciousness among women.

3) What was the role of women in revolutionary and left movements in India?

UNIT 30 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE DALITS*

Structure

30.1 Introduction

30.2 Contextualising Caste Identity

30.3 National Movement and Integration of Dalit Issues

30.4 Politics of Representation

- 30.4.1 Communal Award
- 30.4.2 Poona Pact
- 30.4.3 After Poona Pact

30.5 Dalits' Perspective on National Movement

30.6 Summary

30.7 Exercises

30.1 INTRODUCTION

The challenge before the leadership of national movement was to integrate the divergent interests of different social groups in India in a united movement against the colonial rule. In this Unit we will explain the initiatives taken by the Indian National Congress to take up the issues affecting the lives of Dalits in order to have their support in the movement against colonialism. Administrative, political and economic changes in the wake of the British rule in India and specifically the initiative taken by the colonial government to protect the interests of Dalits gave an impetus to the latent discontent and resentment of Dalits against the oppressive caste system. Dalit intelligentsia at the regional as well as national levels tried to mobilise people belonging to their social groups in order to assert their social and political rights. Liberation from internal oppression rather than liberation from the British rule was the desired goal of Dalit intelligentsia. Indian National Congress realising the need of addressing the sufferings of Dalits advocated for the abolition of untouchability and also believed in social equality and justice. Attempt was made by the nationalists to support the demands of Dalit leadership for democratic rights. In this Unit you will be introduced to Dalits' efforts for creating an alternative ideological tradition in opposition to Brahmanical tradition. You will learn about the initiatives taken by nationalist leadership to address the problems faced by Dalits and how ultimately Dalit leadership agreed to the Poona Pact accepting joint electorate in place of their demand for separate electorate. You will also learn about the ideas of Gandhi and Ambedkar on the issues pertaining to the liberation and empowerment of Dalits and about the reservation of Dalit intelligentsia towards national movement.

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30.2 CONTEXTUALISING CASTE IDENTITY

Dalits in India faced different forms of oppression in the name of caste system irrespective of the province they belonged. It is also true that at various points of time people raised voices against exploitation in the name of caste. One can refer here to Buddhism, Bhakti movements and other anti-caste egalitarian movements. However, since late nineteenth and early twentieth century we witness the emergence of organised movements by Dalits in different provinces of India challenging their given social identity and also claiming their rights in decision making process. The great revolt of 1857 shook the foundation of the colonial rule and the British bureaucracy was seriously engaged in devising strategy to prevent any form of discontent in the local society which may become a threat to the empire. Analysing the complexities of indigenous society the colonial authority decided to make use of internal oppression within local society in the name of caste hierarchy. Along with identification and legitimisation of caste division through official documentation the colonial government adopted specific measures for the benefit of the socially oppressed groups. This friendly gesture of the colonial government aroused aspirations among Dalits to voice their grievances and with the support of government they wanted to defy the authority of upper castes. The policy of colonial government to protect the interests of Dalits and the values of liberty, equality and justice that educated Dalits had learnt from western education gave birth to a new consciousness among Dalits. Nineteenth century socio-religious reformers cautioned about social oppression in the name of caste system but in their criticism they could not come out with an agenda of action which could win over the confidence of Dalits. Early nationalists and even their successors were preoccupied with the oppressive nature of imperialism and their prime concern was to mobilise Indian public opinion for political liberation of India without giving much space to the concerns of Dalits. The aspirations of Dalits, independent of mainstream Indian polity, found expression in the writings of Mahatma Jotiba Phule (1827-1890) who in modern India first raised voice for the liberation of Dalits. Phule is considered the first ideologue of anti-caste movement in modern India. Re-interpreting Indian history and mythology he tried to demolish the ideological foundation of Brahmanism which he considered the key of upper caste hegemony. The journey towards nation building can not be possible so long the oppression continues in the name of caste hierarchy. In his book *Gulamgiri* (1873) he described Brahmans as Aryans who came from outside and subdued the indigenous people who were Shudras and he gave a call to discard caste. Through his writings and speeches Phule tried to construct a new history with the help of symbols and local stories situating Dalits in a powerful position delinking them from the past depicted in the Dharma-shastras and itihasa-purana tradition. Given his understanding of history Phule was a natural critic of nationalism which he equated with another form of Brahmanism. He made it clear: 'There cannot be a 'nation' worth the name until and unless all the people of the land of King Bali – such as Shudras and Ati-Shudras, Bhils (tribals) and fishermen etc., become truly educated, and are able to think independently for themselves and are uniformly unified and emotionally integrated. If a tiny section of the population like the upstart Aryan Brahmins alone were to found in the 'National Congress' who will take any notice of it?' Phule was critical of the reform initiatives taken by Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj and others to rationalise Brahmanical system and strongly argued that without emancipating the oppressed the reform initiatives ensured

domination of upper castes in other forms. Phule wanted to unite the 'bahujan samaj', the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras. Nationalism was seen by him an ideology created by upper castes to downplay the internal divisions within Indian society.

The colonial rule opened up educational and economic opportunities by making provision of reservation for socially oppressed groups. A small section of the oppressed people could take advantage of the new opportunities and became conscious of the exploitation they suffered over the years. They became vocal about the disabilities imposed over them in the name of caste hierarchy and took initiatives by mobilising their fellow caste members to challenge their existing sufferings. Thus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in different provinces we find the sudden growth in writing of caste histories and establishment of caste associations to assert for new identity as well as protection of the interests of their respective caste members. The government initiatives of bringing administrative changes by involving local people through various reform acts further encouraged the socially oppressed groups to demand for political rights which they were denied so far. Phule and Ambedkar in Maharashtra, E. V. Ramaswami Naicker and M. C. Rajah in Tamil Nadu, Narayana Guru in Kerala, Bhagyareddy Varma in Andhra, Mangu Ram in Punjab, Acchutanand in Uttar Pradesh, Panchanan Barma, Rasiklal Biswas, Jogen Mandal and others in Bengal challenged the caste-based discrimination and domination and were critics of the anti-colonial struggle by the upper caste elites without abolishing internal oppression in Indian society. The new political awakening of Dalits is reflected in the writings and activities of Dalit intelligentsia of that period. Emancipation and empowerment of Dalits became the major concern of Dalit intelligentsia which was not in the immediate agenda of mainstream political leaders whose immediate concern was political liberation from colonial rule.

30.3 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND INTEGRATION OF DALIT ISSUES

As we have explained in the previous section that from the beginning of the twentieth century the Dalit leadership became very vocal for their rights. It is generally argued that the policies of the colonial government like the inclusion of caste status in the census, provision for welfare measures along caste lines, nomination of Dalits in local bodies, etc. encouraged the Dalit leadership to assert for social emancipation as well as empowerment. Take for example the resolution passed in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1928, 'This assembly recommends to the Governor General in Council to issue directions to Local Governments to provide special facilities for the education of the untouchables and other depressed classes, particularly by reserving seats in teachers' training classes for them and also for opening all public services for them'. In its early phase the nationalist leaders engaged themselves in taking up political and administrative issues rather than addressing social problems. There was the National Social Conference which was expected to deliberate on social issues. At individual level the Congress leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Lala Lajpat Rai were of the opinion that removal of untouchability and social reform were necessary for national regeneration. In its annual session at Calcutta in 1917 for the first time Indian National Congress passed the resolution for abolition of untouchability and appealed to the people for removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon Dalits. Emergence of Gandhi brought a significant change in

the character of national movement by bringing masses in the mainstream national movement. Gandhi was particularly concerned of the sufferings of Dalits and made the removal of untouchability an integral part for national liberation. In the Nagpur session of Indian National Congress held in 1920 it was resolved that

'…the movement of non-co-operation can only succeed by complete co-operation amongst the people themselves, this Congress calls upon the public associations to advance Hindu-Muslim unity and the Hindu delegates of this Congress to call upon the leading Hindus to settle all disputes between Brahmins and non-Brahmins wherever they may be existing and to make a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability, and respectfully urges the religious heads to help the growing desire to reform Hinduism in the matter of its treatment of the suppressed classes.'

Gandhi firmly believed that removal of untouchability was essential to attain Swaraj and he played a key role in incorporating the removal of untouchability in the resolution of the non-cooperation. Following the suspension of non-cooperation in 1922 the Congress party workers were instructed by the party working committee to encourage Dalits to send their children to national schools, to provide them same facilities as given to other citizens and also to assist in improving their social and moral condition. As president of the Belgaum session of the Congress in 1924 Gandhi said that Hindu Congressmen in particular should devote greater attention to anti-untouchability movement because the British government was exploiting Dalits for a political end. In 1924 Gandhi supported the Vaikom Satyagraha movement organised by the Kerala Congress Committee to secure the rights of untouchables for using the forbidden roads to the temple. The Congress Working Committee in its meeting at Delhi in 1929 appointed an Anti-untouchability sub-committee with Madan Mohan Malaviya as its president and Jamnalal Bajaj as the secretary to ensure Dalits' rights to enter temples, to use public wells, to provide sanitary living and to remove restrictions which Dalit children were facing in schools. During the course of civil disobedience movement the campaign for removal of untouchability continued and Gandhi said that 'Remember that in Swaraj we would expect one drawn from the so-called lower class to preside over India's destiny'. [Young India, 3 April 1930]. Thus the nationalist leadership was very concerned with the sufferings of Dalits and made efforts to initiate actions for securing social justice to Dalits in order to have their support in the movement against the colonial rule. In the next section we will discuss that how the nationalist leadership succeeded in persuading Dalit intelligentsia to accept joint electorate system in place of their demand for separate electorate system for the larger interest of the nation.

30.4 POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

In the 1920s, when the process was set in for electoral reforms aiming at making the government more broad based and representative, the issue of representation of the Dalits created divergent views within the local society. Among the Dalits at the national level two major identifiable groups emerged in the late 1920s, one around M.C. Rajah and the other around B.R. Ambedkar. M.C. Rajah and his associates who dominated the All India Depressed Classes Association decided not to accept proposals of the Simon Commission in the absence of separate electorates. They were of the opinion that joint electorates would return only

dummy representatives of the Dalits backed by upper caste Hindus. However, in the ensuing struggle within the Dalits to represent them in the proposed round Table Conference in London, Ambedkar was nominated by the British government to represent the Dalits. In a bid to check Ambedkar, M.C. Rajah convened an All India Depressed Classes Leaders special conference in August 1930 at Allahabad. This conference disowned the resolutions taken at the first session of the All India Depressed Classes Congress committee under the leadership of Ambedkar and declared the All India Depressed Classes as the real body. But Rajah, failing to get the British support in favour of his claim, came close to the Indian National Congress. Indian National Congress was also seriously trying to get the support of the Dalits so that the unity among Indians remained strong. Equally anxious were the Hindu Mahasabha leaders to find some way out to check the disintegration of the Hindus. In this process M.C. Rajah and B.S. Moonje, president of the Hindu Mahasabha, entered into an agreement known as the Rajah-Moonje Pact in 1932, based on the principle of reservation of seats in joint electorates. Opinions among the Dalits were divided over the Rajah-Moonje Pact. A section of the Dalits made a statement that the All India Depressed Classes Association was not representative of the Dalits in India. They expressed their support in favour of separate electorate. Ambedkar was very much opposed to the Rajah-Moonje Pact and stated that the Dalits had repudiated the Pact.

30.4.1 Communal Award

Next important development on the question of ensuring political rights to Dalits was the announcement of Communal Award by the British government. The Communal Award gave the Dalits voting right along with caste Hindus in the general constituencies and also an extra vote in special 'Depressed Classes' constituencies numbering 71 for a period of 20 years. The announcement of Communal Award was considered as clear indication of widening the rift between the Dalits and caste Hindus posing a serious challenge to Indian nationalist movement. Gandhi opposing the segregation of the Dalits into a separate electoral group wrote,

'So far as Hinduism is concerned separate electorate would simply vivisect and disrupt it. For me the question of these classes is predominantly moral and religious….I feel that no penance that caste Hindus may do can, in any way, compensate for the calculated degradation to which they have consigned the Depressed Classes for centuries. But I know that separate electorate is neither penance nor any remedy for the crushing degradation they have groaned under.' (CWMG, Vol. LXIX, p. 191).

Gandhi in his letter to the British government informed his decision for going to fast unto death unless the government withdrew the scheme of separate electorate for the Dalits. He further explained that he might be wrong in taking this decision but to him the scheme of separate electorate was against the interest of the Dalits. Gandhi was supportive of adequate representation of the Dalits but he was not agreeable to the proposal of separate electorate. He differed strongly on this matter with the leaders of the Dalits. The weapon of fast used by Gandhi aroused strong public opinion and public meetings were organised in different places to bring the caste Hindus and the Dalits together. Even leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha appealed to their followers to demonstrate equality in religious and social matters towards the Dalits. Appeal was also made to the Dalits not to

press for separate electorate. Gandhi confided to his close associates that the Dalits would fail to understand his decision of fasting when they were granted some privileges. Ambedkar's response to Gandhi's decision of fast was different and he said, 'I do not care for these political stunts. This threat of Mr. Gandhi to starve himself to death is not a moral fight but only a political move. I can understand a person trying to negotiate with his political opponents on equal terms but I will never be moved by those methods….If Mr. Gandhi wants to fight with his life for the interests of the Hindu community, the depressed Classes will also be forced to fight with their lives to safeguard their interests.' The British government saw in Gandhi's fast a ploy to coerce the Dalits in accepting the Congress viewpoint.

30.4.2 Poona Pact

The British government justified its action of announcing the Communal Award on the ground that Indian leaders failed to arrive at an agreement on the issue of representation of the Dalits in the Round Table Conference. In the given situation to protect the interests of the Dalits the government had announced this scheme. But Gandhi's moral weapon forced various sections of Indian leaders to work out a compromise formula between the separate electorate and joint electorate. Gandhi in principle was opposed to reservation of seats either through joint or separate electorate. But sensing the prevailing mood of the Dalits, he agreed to accept reservation of seats in joint electorates. In spite of opposition to Gandhi's approach to the issue of representation of the Dalits, Ambedkar agreed to consider Gandhi's proposal provided that the scheme guarantees better than the Communal Award. Ambedkar after meeting Gandhi who was at that time at Yeravda jail got the assurance of Gandhi that the interest of his community would be safe in the proposed scheme. Gandhi assured that he would end fast as soon as the separate electorate was replaced by joint electorate. This softened Ambedkar's attitude. After prolonged deliberations between the leaders of the two groups a formula based on the principle of joint electorate was devised. In place of 71 seats given by the Communal Award, 148 seats were reserved for the Dalits in the provincial legislatures. As regards the central legislature 18 per cent of the total seats meant for general electorate would be kept for the Dalits. It was also decided that continuance of reservation would be decided in future by mutual agreement. On 24 September 1932 the Poona Pact was signed between the leaders of the Dalits and caste Hindus and the same was sent to the British Prime Minister for acceptance. The major provisions of the Poona Pact are as follows:

'There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of general electorates. Seats in the Provincial Legislatures shall be as follows – Madras 30; Bombay with Sind 15; Punjab 8; Bihar and Orissa 18; Central Provinces 20; Assam 7; Bengal 30; United Provinces 20 (Total-148).

Election to these seats shall be by joint electorates subject, however, to the following procedure:

All the members of the Depressed Classes, registered in the general electoral roll in a constituency, will form an electoral college which will elect a panel of four candidates belonging to the Depressed Classes for each of such reserved seats by the method of the single vote; the four persons getting the highest number of votes in such primary election shall be candidates for election by the general electorate.

Representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature shall likewise be on the principle of joint electorates and reserved seats by the method of primary election in the manner provided for in clause 2 above for their representation in Provincial Legislatures.

In the Central legislature eighteen per cent of the seats allotted to the general electorate for British India in the said legislature shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes.'

At a conference of the Hindu leaders in Bombay to ratify the Poona Pact Ambedkar said,

'I was immensely surprised that there was so much in common between Mr. Gandhi and myself….My only regret is why did not Mr. Gandhi take the attitude he took now at the Round Table Conference. If he had shown some consideration and the same attitude as he took now, I think it would not have been necessary for him to undergo the ordeal.' (*The Times of India*, 26 September 1932).

In the same conference the president made a resolution in the following words:

'This Conference resolves that henceforth amongst Hindus no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same rights as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads, and all public institutions. These rights shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest acts of the Swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time.'

'It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by caste-men upon the so-called untouchable classes including the bar in respect of admission to temples.' (*The Times of India*, 26 September 1932).

As promised Gandhi ended his fast after the signing of the pact. He found in this victory of his political and social goals. This further encouraged him to carry forward his movement for social equality. The promise of a large number of seats for the Dalits aroused the hope of strong voice of the Dalits in public life.

To Ambedkar rights of the Dalits were most important compared to political independence, whereas Gandhi was fighting a two-pronged battle, one for India's independence, the other for maintaining the cohesiveness of Hindu society. Gandhi explained the essence of the settlement in the following words:

'The settlement is but the beginning of the end. The political part of it, very important though it no doubt is, occupies but a small space in the vast field of reform that has to be tackled by caste Hindus during the coming days, namely, the complete removal of social and religious disabilities under which a large part of the Hindu population has been groaning. I should be guilty of a breach of trust if I did not warn fellow reformers and caste Hindus in general that the breaking of the fast carried with it a sure promise of resumption of it if this reform is not relentlessly pursued and achieved within a measurable period….the message of freedom shall penetrate every untouchable home and that can only happen if reformers will cover every village.' (CWMG, Vol. LI).

30.4.3 After Poona Pact

Apart from the importance ensured by the Poona Pact in representing Dalits in decision making process, it was proclaimed in the Poona Pact that one of the earliest legislations in free India would be to provide for the statutory recognition of equal rights for Dalits. In 1932 the Harijan Sevak Sangh was founded and next year it started a mouthpiece called Harijan. Removal of disabilities of Dalits through constructive programme of social, educational and material development of Dalits was the objective of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Securing the entry of Dalits in temples as equal citizens was the other major agenda of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Although Gandhi succeeded in drawing large number of people to the Harijan movement but there was also reservation within the Congress towards Harijan movement. There was also opposition to the legislation for temple entry and removal of untouchability. Seeing the opposition to the passage of anti-untouchability legislations Gandhi observed three weeks fast in 1933. Gandhi travelled various parts of country during 1933-1934 to create awareness among people for temple entry and removal of untouchability. In some places Gandhi faced bitter opposition from orthodox people. The joint electorate and the harijan movement definitely succeeded in making an impact in society in general and the massive victory of the Congress candidates from reserved constituencies in the general election of 1937 may be considered as indication of this impact.

30.5 DALITS' PERSPECTIVE ON NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Efforts made by leaders of nationalist movement succeeded in bringing a section of Dalit leadership in the fold of national movement besides the participation of Dalit masses in various popular movements against the colonial rule. But majority of Dalit intelligentsia was critical of the lack of commitment on the part of the Congress to share power with Dalits and expressed serious doubt about the commitment of upper caste leadership to bring social equality. The best example of this was Ambedkar's book he wrote in 1945, titled 'What Congress and Gandhi had done to Untouchables'. Ambedkar was so much concerned about oppression and exploitation faced by Dalits that any form of struggle without referring to the abolition of internal oppression had no importance to him. To Ambedkar, without ensuring equal rights of Dalits political freedom had no meaning. Gaining political freedom from the British was not adequate to him unless the struggle for freedom ensured the dignity of life and equal rights to all its citizens. Ambedkar said, 'the freedom which the governing class in India was struggling for is freedom that rules the servile classes in India'. He wrote:

> 'Words such as society, nation and country are just amorphous, if not ambiguous, terms….Nation though one word means many classes. Philosophically it may be possible to consider a nation as a unit but sociologically it cannot but be regarded as consisting of many classes and the freedom of the nation if it is to be a reality must vouchsafe the freedom of the different classes comprised in it, particularly those who are treated as the servile classes.' [BAWS, VOL.9, PP. 201-2].

> 'I am sure, many have felt that if there was any class which deserved to be given special political rights in order to protect itself against the tyranny of

the majority under the Swaraj Constitution it was the Depressed Classes. Here is a class which is undoubtedly not in a position to sustain itself in the struggle for existence. The religion to which they are tied, instead of providing for them an honourable place, brands them as lepers, not fit for ordinary intercourse. Economically, it is a class entirely dependent upon the high-caste-Hindus for earning its daily bread with no independent way of living open to it. Nor are all ways closed by reason of the social prejudices of the Hindus but there is a definite attempt all throughout the Hindu society to bolt every possible door so as not to allow the Depressed Classes any opportunity to rise in the scale of life. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to say that in every village the caste-Hindus, however divided among themselves, are always in a standing conspiracy to put down in a merciless manner any attempt on the part of the Depressed Classes who form a small and scattered body of an ordinary Indian citizen.' [BAWS, vol.9, p. 311].

'We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands. No share of this political power can evidently come to us so long as the British government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power in our own hands, without which we cannot bring salvation to our people. [BAWS, v.2, pp.503-06].

In the high noon of India's struggle for freedom Dalit intelligentsia in a big way expressed its support to the British government on the ground that the upper caste Hindu leaders were not inclined to share power with Dalits. They felt that, without social revolution giving equality to Dalits, change in political leadership would further strengthen the hold of the upper castes over Dalits. Analysing Dalit movements in Maharashtra, Andhra and Karnataka Gail Omvedt has observed that '…the Dalit movement and the overall radical anti-caste movements were a crucial expression of the democratic revolution in India, more consistently democratic – and in the end more consistently "nationalistic" – than the elite-controlled Indian National Congress.' [Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, p.16].

Valerian Rodrigues argued that 'irrespective of their other differences, dalit-bahujan thinkers conceive the nation as a good society where its members, considered as individuals or collectivities, respect one another, protect mutual rights and show concern and solidarity. Self-respecters, therefore, felt that as long as there is the existence of untouchability, all talk of freedom and self-rule is empty. Periyar argued that the liberation of the Shudra was contingent on, and would be complete only with the liberation of the Panchama'. [Valerian Rodrigues, *Dalit-Bahujan Discourse, Critical Quest*, Delhi, 2008, pp. 24-25]

What is important to note in this context is that strong advocacy of Dalit intelligentsia for giving primacy to their socio-economic and political rights and not to anti-colonial struggle was primarily rooted in their experiences of living in an unjust society. Their notion of nationhood was based on abolition of existing inequalities and also having equal rights in every sphere of life. To the mainstream nationalist leaders uniting Indians against the atrocities of the colonial rule and to compel the British to leave India was the major goal before the nation. It is also important to note that Dalits were not a homogenous group and there were differences at various levels within the Dalit leadership and in many popular

revolts like Tebhaga movement in Bengal Dalit masses in large numbers took part in movement against the wishes of their caste elders.

30.6 SUMMARY

Historical tradition of anti-caste ideology in the form of Bhakti, Buddhism or other religious traditions along with the changes brought in by the British rule encouraged a section of Dalits to challenge their given social identity and to assert for socio-economic and political rights. Through the creation of alternative tradition to legitimize their claim social dignity and justice Dalit leadership engaged themselves in bargaining for political power in decision making process and also support for education and employment opportunities. Leadership of the national movement, particularly Gandhi, viewed the problem of Dalits as predominantly a religious matter and in no way he wanted any division within the Hindus for the greater cause of political emancipation. Gandhi said, 'Without eradicating untouchability root and branch the honour of Hinduism cannot be saved. That can only happen when untouchables are treated on par with caste Hindus in every respect.' In spite of his concern for Dalits Gandhi could read the design of the government in creating division within Indian society by announcing the Communal Award. This forced Gandhi to announce his decision for going to fast unto death to resist the contemplated separation of Dalits. This decision of Gandhi succeeded in bringing different groups together and the outcome was the Poona Pact which ensured for the first time 148 reserved seats for Dalits out of general electorates in Provincial Legislatures. Whereas Gandhi and other mainstream nationalist leaders were concerned with uniting divergent sections of Indian society against the British, the visible section of Dalit intelligentsia strongly believed that without liberating and empowering Dalits from their existing state of sufferings any form of political freedom was not going to make them equal. The efforts made by nationalist leadership to create public awareness about the sufferings of Dalits and the initiatives taken by the Congress through anti-untouchability movement, constructive programmes and temple entry movements paved the way for taking direct action to empower Dalits. Therefore it is essential to understand the challenges before the mainstream nationalists to integrate Dalits in the national movement and also the dilemmas of Dalit leadership towards the upper castes.

30.7 EXERCISES

1) Why were the important Dalit leaders in favour of separate electorates?

2) Discuss the provisions of the Poona Pact.

3) Discuss the manner in which the nationalist leadership tried to integrate the Dalits within the mainstream of the national movement.

UNIT 31 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND THE MINORITIES*

Structure

31.1 Introduction

31.2 The Major Historiographical Questions

31.3 Congress and Muslim Minority Relationship from 1885 to 1914

31.4 Unity at Lucknow

31.5 Congress and Minorities during Khilafat and Non-Cooperation

31.6 Congress and Minorities after Non-Cooperation Period

31.7 The Communal Award of 1932 and the Congress

31.8 Congress and the Sikh Minority

31.9 Summary

31.10 Exercises

31.1 INTRODUCTION

A minority is a sociological category within the demographic profile of a country. The term usually refers to a category that is differentiated and defined by the social majority, that is, those who hold the majority of positions of social power in a society. The differentiation can be based on one or more observable human characteristics, including, for example, ethnicity, race, gender, wealth or sexual orientation. However, the minority may be based on real or assumed sense of suffering discrimination and subordination, physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart, and which are disapproved by the dominant group, and a shared sense of collective identity and common burdens. In a colonial society where power belongs to the powerful alien rulers, minority/majority distinction is based not on the real power differences among groups, but may show the differences in population size among groups as well as their relative socio-economic position within the colonial society. Prior to the British conquest, relations between regional polities and the sovereign power had never been defined wholly by religion. Despite a long history of ingeniously accepting multiple levels of sovereignty, the renegotiation of the terms for division of power at the time of independence led to the partition of the subcontinent along superficially religious lines. In this Unit, therefore, we would focus on the problem of relation with religious minorities especially Muslim religious minority with the mainstream national movement represented by the Indian National Congress.

31.2 THE MAJOR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS

A straightforward approach to the study of nationalism traces the development of nationalism from the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and culminating in the winning of independence from the British. The 'two-nation'

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theory or British strategies of divide and rule is seen as the main reason behind subsequent failure of the process of nation-in-the-making and the ultimate partition. Some goes to the extent of supporting the thesis of Hindu-Muslim difference as incapable of assimilation. This view conflates religiously informed cultural identities with the notion of a coherent Muslim politics. However, like all the other communities of religion in colonial India, Muslims were split on doctrinal issues and divided by class, region as well as language. The opposing viewpoint subscribed to by Indian nationalist historians is equally untenable. They charge British colonialism of creating the historical and cultural divisions of the subcontinent and propose that cultural difference or, worse still, the religious 'communalism' was the pejorative 'other' of Indian nationalism fostered by British policies of separate electorates and selective patronage of the 'Muslim community'. C.A. Bayly, the prominent Cambridge historian locates the pre-history of communalism in the merchant corporations and the declining service gentry of urban north India during the transition to colonialism. Scholars of 'Subaltern' school emphasise the resilience of age old communal consciousness in attempting to explain failure of nationalism to unify the various classes and communities and concerned themselves with the colonial construction of communalism. However, we see that there were complexities, inconsistencies and contradictions in the relationship between the nationalist movement and the minorities whether Muslim, Sikh or Depressed Castes.

The colonial state's stated policy of neutrality based on indifference towards religion was a product of expediency, not belief. In their search for collaborators and the organisation of social control, religion also served a useful political purpose. British perceptions of Indian society as an aggregation of religious communities created a belief in the distinctiveness of various religious communities in idioms emphasising differences, not commonalities between Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Christian and Parsi. Yet British social engineering on its own cannot explain the strength of the process marking Indian attempts to deploy the categories of the colonial state to their own social and political advantage. With the limited introduction of the electoral principle in the late nineteenth century, members of the educated, propertied and privileged sections belonging to all religious denominations had an interest in promoting the politicisation of communitarian identities. Taking advantage of a rapidly growing press and publications market, those claiming to represent 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' interests projected their specifically class and regional concerns in terms of religious community interests. Such political discourses, however, were internally divided and vague and ambiguous.

31.3 CONGRESS AND MUSLIM MINORITY RELATIONSHIP FROM 1885 TO 1914

A large section of Indian Muslims from the *ashraf*, literally respectable, classes opted to stay away from the Congress which was founded in 1885. However, political boundaries were very fluid and economic class interests, regional identity and different notions of community all played a crucial role at the historical moment when the idea of an Indian nation was itself in the process of being forged, negotiated and contested. Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the most important spokesperson of the north Indian Urdu-speaking *ashraf* classes in the late nineteenth century, spearheaded a reform movement within Indian Islam. In 1875

with British support he set up the Aligarh Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College which attracted the sons of Muslim landlords of northern India. While firmly opposing Muslim involvement in the Indian National Congress, Sayyid Ahmed spent the better part of his energies exhorting his co-religionists against cultural exclusiveness and the pest of religious narrow-mindedness. His criticisms of the Congress had less to do with the threats it posed to the religious identity of Muslims than with the cultural pretensions and different claims of the north Indian *ashraf* class. Just a year before the formation of the Congress, he had expressed his contempt for those who identified religion or community with the nation: terms like Hindu and Muslim had a religious significance, and all those living in India constituted one 'nation'. Yet sometimes he is depicted as a person who began the process of 'Muslim separatism'.

Within his own community, Sayyid Ahmed was attacked for his rational approach to Islamic religious studies and commandments by *ulema* in religious seminaries at Deoband and Farangi Mahal in Lucknow. His passionate backing of western knowledge and culture as well as allegiance to the raj annoyed many Muslims deeply fond of their community moorings and the ideal of a universal Muslim *ummah*. Disapproval of the Aligarh school received a boost from the great cleric of Islamic universalism, Jamaluddin al-Afghani, who lived in the subcontinent between 1879 and 1882. In India, Afghani tempered his loyalty to the political principles of universalism by calling for Hindu-Muslim unity against British imperialism. Sayyid Ahmad may have been the most well-known spokesman of regionally based North Indian Muslim powerful social groups, but his leadership was disputed by the very Muslim *ashraf* classes on whose behalf he made his loudest appeals. By the late 1880s Britain's imperial policies in India and new colonial conquests in the Islamic world were leading more and more Muslims to avoid the policy of non-participation in the Congress. An increasing number of Muslims from the North West Provinces began attending the annual sessions of the Congress. In 1887, Badruddin Tyabji, a Bombay based lawyer from the Bohra community, became the first Muslim president of the Congress. By 1895 the well known Islamic scholar Maulana Shibli Numani, who had in the beginning associated himself with Sayyid Ahmed Khan, was publicly opposing the policy of Muslim non-participation in the Congress. Secular nationalism was mainly territorial nationalism, based on the reference to India as a nation-state. This concept was introduced into India from Britain and France after the French Revolution and the era of 'Enlightenment' in the 18th and 19th centuries. Contrary to territorial nationalism, or rather in addition to it, the Indian nationalist movement developed nationalist variations in which a sometimes dispersed religious community was taken as a reference basis for nationalist aspirations instead of an ethnic group or a political territory with comparatively fixed boundaries of geographical settlement.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 may have provided the main drive for the orchestration of the Muslim claim to separate political representation and the establishment of the self professedly 'communal' All-India Muslim League in December 1906. But it was the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 which institutionalised what until then had been a main colonial perception of the importance of religious divisions in Indian society by granting Muslims separate electorates in representative bodies at all levels of the electoral system. It was a historic step that gave Muslims the status of an all-India political category but one effectively consigned to being an everlasting minority in any scheme of

constitutional reforms. The structural contradiction between communal electorates and the local based and region based political horizons was to have large consequences for India's regionally differentiated, economically dissimilar and ideologically divided Muslims and, by extension, for Congress's agendas of an inclusionary and secular nationalism. The common idioms of an otherwise wide-ranging discourse created the colonial Muslims as a separate and exclusive 'communal' category.

The Indian Councils Act 1909, commonly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that brought about a limited increase in the involvement of Indians in the governance of British India. John Morley, the Liberal Secretary of State for India, and the Conservative Governor-General of India, The Earl of Minto, believed that cracking down on uprising in Bengal was necessary but not sufficient for restoring stability to the British Raj after Lord Curzon's partitioning of Bengal. They believed that a dramatic step was required to put heart into loyal elements of the Indian upper classes and the growing Westernised section of the population. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 (Morley-Minto reforms) did not go any significant distance toward meeting the Indian National Congress demand for 'the system of government obtaining in Self-Governing British Colonies'.

The Act of 1909 was important for the following reasons. It effectively allowed the election of Indians to the various legislative councils in India for the first time. Previously some Indians had been appointed to legislative councils. The majorities of the councils remained British government appointments. Moreover the electorate was limited to specific classes of Indian nationals. Muslims had expressed serious concern that British type of electoral system would leave them permanently subject to Hindu majority rule. The Act of 1909 stipulated, as demanded by the Muslim leadership:

i) that Indian Muslims be allotted reserved seats in the Municipal and District Boards, in the Provincial Councils and in the Imperial Legislature;

ii) that the number of reserved seats be in excess of their relative population (25 percent of the Indian population); and

iii) that only Muslims should vote for candidates for the Muslim seats ('separate electorates').

These concessions were a constant source of strife during 1909-47. British statesmen generally considered reserved seats as regrettable in that they encouraged communal extremism as Muslim candidates did not have to appeal for Hindu votes and vice versa. As further power was shifted from the British to Indian politicians in 1919, 1935 and after, Muslims were ever more determined to hold on to, and if possible expand, reserved seats and their weightage. However, The Congress repeatedly tried to eliminate reserved seats as it considered them to be undemocratic and to hinder the development of a shared Hindu-Muslim Indian national feeling. Under the system, Muslim voters (and later Sikh and Christians) were put in separate constituencies from which candidates of that particular community could stand as candidates or vote. It heightened community based mobilisation and conflicts. Since the voters were exclusively from a single religious community, the candidates could easily appeal to sectarian interests.

The Muslim political elite was opposed to revocation of the Partition of Bengal and Muslim League was moving in a more militant direction. Alienated by Britain's refusal to help Turkey in her Italian and Balkan Wars (1911-12), Hardinge's rejection of proposals for a Muslim University at Aligarh in August 1912 and the August 1913 riot in Kanpur over demolition of a platform adjoining a mosque. There was some sort of an accommodation with 'nationalist' Hindus and growing impact of pan-Islamism on the young leaders. Its leaders now included Wazir Hassan, T.A.K. Sherwani, and more radical Ali brothers (Muhammad and Shaukat) and Hasrat Mohini in U.P. and Fazlul Haq in Bengal. Papers like Muhammad Ali's Comrade (Kolkata), Abul Kalam Asad's Al-Hilal (Kolkata) and Safar Ali Khan's Samindar (Lahore) propagated pan-Islamist and and anti-British ideas. The Muslim League passed a resolution in March 1913 favouring colonial self-government through constitutional means, a stated objective of the Congress Party. The stage was, thus set for a broader Hindu-Muslim political accommodation and co-operation.

31.4 UNITY AT LUCKNOW

In 1915, already there was re-entry of the 'extremist' faction into Congress and both the Congress and Muslim League, meeting simultaneously at Bombay, set up committees to draft a programme of minimum constitutional demands through mutual consultations. At Lucknow in December 1916, a common demand was raised by both parties for elected majorities in the Councils, while Hindu-Muslim differences were sought to be removed through the famous Lucknow Pact by which Congress accepted the separate electorates and an understanding was reached for distribution of seats. The Muslim League accepted under-representation in Muslim-majority areas (40% of seats in Bengal, for example), in return for over-representation in other Hindu-majority provinces like Bombay or United Provinces, where about 30% seats were assigned to them. The Pact, thus paved the way for accommodation of United Province's faction of Muslim League but there was also some resentment against the pact in Bengal despite the support of Fazlul Haq. Both Tilak and Annie Besant played important role in these negotiations. However, leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya felt that too much have been given to the Muslim League. But Tilak felt that this concession was necessary in view of common interests of different shades of political opinions within the country against the third party of the British colonial rulers. It was a controversial decision but the Congress leaders thought that it was indispensable to allay minority fears about majority domination.

31.5 CONGRESS AND THE MINORITIES DURING KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION

The Khilafat issue was a significant anxiety of the Indian Muslims in the wake of the British pressure on Turkey and the resulting reduction in size as well as importance of Ottoman Empire after the First World War. The religious sentiments of Muslims in India were also intensified due to the fact that India was a colony of the British. The Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements created a very strong emotional and political appeal against the British. Gandhi used these sentiments to create a united front of Hindus and Muslims and demanded steps towards self-government in India and also protection for the religious and political institution of Khalifa. The Khilafat movement emerged among Indian Muslims

to protect the institution of Khalifa in Turkey, which was considered to be the religious and political successor of the Prophet Muhammad and hence the protector of all Muslim holy places. Turkey fought against the British and its allies during the First World War. After the War, The British removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. The pan-Islamic feelings became intense among the Indian Muslims. However, the pan-Islamic symbols may have been used to establish a pan-Indian religious and political identity for Muslims and to bridge the communal boundaries between the nationalist leadership and Muslims. The Khilafat movement was also anti-imperialist in its nature and scope. There were several other political and economic factors that fuelled the political mobilisation in this period. Gandhi's techniques and ideas made possible the convergence of a purely secular and territorial notion of nationhood with religious issues of Muslim minority. The Khilafat leaders and Muslim elites also realised the need to garner the support of Hindus and especially Congress organisation for furthering their cause. This campaign brought about an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity. Both Hindus and Muslims demonstrated together at various places. The Khilafat leaders urged the Muslims not to kill cows for Bakr-Id festivities; Swami Sharddhanand was asked to give a speech from the pulpit of Jama Masjid in Delhi, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was given the keys of Golden Temple in Amritsar. There were hundreds of such acts of communal harmony throughout the country. The idioms and symbols used by the Khilafat leaders were entirely community-oriented and they were simply trying to get the support of the Hindus against the set of non-Muslim, i.e., the British. Even though the movement was anti-imperialist, the political language was basically Islamic and some Congress leaders were apprehensive that it would be dangerous for the Congress to use such issues for nationalist mobilisation. However, Gandhi and his group went ahead with Khilafat leaders and tried to forge Hindu-Muslim unity and mobilise people of both communities in Non-Cooperation agitation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali toured the entire country for this joint mobilisation. However, When Gandhi withdrew the Non-Cooperation after the famous Chauri-Chaura incidents in February 1922, Ali Brothers reacted angrily to the decision of withdrawal of the movement.

31.6 CONGRESS AND MINORITIES AFTER NON-COOPERATION PERIOD

Congress considered the Indian national movement indivisible which meant that its stake to power was also indivisible. This prevented Congress leaders from coming to terms with the Muslim League in 1937 and thereafter, until it was too late for an amicable settlement. Things were made even more complicated because leaders like Nehru and Gandhi, no matter how sensibly and carefully they behaved in most cases, or how hard they tried to unite all Indians and all religions on a common platform against colonialism, could not shed the religious cloth of their nationalist aspirations entirely. Gandhi, on a unitarian note, incorporated Hinduist values like non-violence and the reverence of the *chakra* (wheel) into the nationalist movement which helped it spread out among the masses, but which also gave political leaders of religious movements a pretext for confrontation. Gandhi argued that the practice of religious pilgrimage which involved the visiting of sacred centres in various parts of India, linked people from many regions into a cultural unity: "We were one nation before [the British] came to India." Indian civilisation, culture and nationhood all predated the British arrival. He argued that "India . . . has nothing to learn from anybody else. India did not cease to be

one nation because different religious groups or foreigners lived in it". He maintained that India "must have a faculty for assimilation." He supported the introduction of Hindi in either Persian or *Devanagari* characters as a compulsory medium of instruction with optional English courses all over India.

The gulf between Congress and the minorities especially the Muslims widened more after the withdrawal of Non-Cooperation movement. Older communally-minded organisations were revived after the movement and some new ones came into existence. *Tanzeem* and *Tabligh* movements gained ground among the Muslims in the same way as the *Sangathan* and *Shuddhi* had grown among the Hindus. It was period when leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malaviya and N. C. Kelkar joined the Hindu Mahasabha and argued for Hindu unity and solidarity. Khilafat leaders Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali accused the Congress of trying to establish a Hindu Government and Hindu domination in the polity. There were communal riots too in many parts of the country during 1923-24. Congress tried to deal with this situation by attempt to unify two communities through unity of top leaders. This 'unity from above' approach meant that negotiations with 'communal' leaders and organisations were used as tools to arrive at a compromise with minorities on the question of 'protecting' and 'safeguarding' their interests in terms of reservation of seats in the legislatures and in government jobs. In order to meet the challenge posed by the Simon Commission, Indian leaders organised several all-India Conferences to settle these issues and to draw up a blue print of an agreed constitution for India. A large number of Muslim leaders met at Delhi in 1927 and came up with four basic demands which came to be known as Delhi Proposals. These Proposals were as follows:

1) Sind should be made a separate province;

2) The North-West Frontier Province should be treated constitutionally on the same footing as the other provinces;

3) Muslims should get one-third representation in the Central Legislature; and

4) In Punjab and Bengal, Muslims should get representation in proportion of their population, thus guaranteeing a Muslim majority in the legislatures and in other provinces, where Muslims were in minority, the existing reservation of seats for Muslims should continue.

In opposition to these proposals, Congress came up with its own proposals drafted by an all-parties committee. This Report came to be popularly known as Nehru Report and was placed before an All-Party Convention in Calcutta in December 1928. The Nehru Report recommended that India should be a federation of linguistic provinces and there should be some level of provincial autonomy for these provinces. Elections were to be held on the basis of joint electorates but the Report suggested that seats in Central and provincial legislatures should be reserved for religious minorities in proportion to their population. The Report also recommended separation of Sind from Bombay and constitutional reform in North-West Frontier Province. Differences cropped up in the All-Party Convention in Calcutta. A section of Muslim League and Khilafat leaders were willing to accept joint electorates and other proposals provided their amendments moved by M. A Jinnah were accepted. These amendments were same as point number 3 and 4 of Delhi proposals and they also demanded the residuary powers

of legislation should rest with the provinces in the proposed federation. But a larger section of Muslim League led by Mohammed Shafi and Agha Khan refused even to accept these amendments and showed their unwillingness to surrender separate electorates. The Hindu Mahasabha and The Sikh League also raised objections to separation of Sind as well as other provisions suggested for North-West Frontier Province, Punjab and Bengal in the Report. They were also adamant not to accede to Jinnah's amendment. Even Congress was not in a mood to accept amendment regarding the residuary powers to the provinces and favoured a strong centre. Muslim Leaders of all hues now put forward a joint front and Jinnah too joined them and declared that Nehru Report was biased towards Muslims and a tool to create Hindu domination. Muslim leaders came up with fourteen points which were based on Four Delhi Proposals along with the amendments moved by Jinnah to Nehru Report and continuation of separate electorates and reservation of seats for Muslims in government services and all self-governing bodies. The attempt at compromise formula thus ended in a complete failure.

31.7 THE COMMUNAL AWARD OF 1932 AND THE CONGRESS

The British tried to use the religious and other identities for their own political purposes. The Communal Award announced in August 1932 was also such an effort of the British ruling class. The Award allotted to each minority a number of seats in the reconstituted legislatures to be elected on the basis of separate electorates. Muslims, Sikhs and Christians had already been treated as minorities earlier and now the Award declared that the Depressed Classes would also be treated as a minority and hence entitled to separate electorates from the rest of the Hindu community. The Congress has been opposed to the principle of separate electorate for various communities on religious ground, although it has accepted it briefly under Lucknow Pact (1916) as a kind of compromise. Congress thought that such a move to grant separate voting rights under separate electorates would divide Indian people and prevent the growth of national consciousness. Congress took the position that although it was opposed to separate electorates, it will not demand change in the Award without the consent of minorities.

But the effort to treat the Depressed Classes as a minority community was vehemently opposed by the Congress leaders because that would create separate electorate for them from the rest of the Hindus and make them separate political entities. Gandhiji, particularly, in Yervada prison at that time, took a strong exception to this move and saw it as an attack on Indian nationhood and felt it would endanger his social reform agenda of abolition of untouchability. Gandhiji demanded that the representatives of the Depressed Classes should be elected by a general electorate under a common franchise. He however favoured a larger number of reserved seats in legislatures for the Depressed Classes. He went on a fast unto death on 20 September, 1932 to put into effect his demands. There was an emotional reaction to the news of Gandhiji fast and leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, M. C. Rajah and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar held discussions and negotiations. The end result of this was the famous Poona Pact, according to which the idea of separate electorate for the Depressed Classes was dropped but the seats reserved for them in provincial legislatures were increased from 71 to 147 and in the Central Legislature to 18% of the total seats.

In the Punjab the Unionist leaders Fazl-i-Husain and Sikander Hayat Khan, and in Bengal the Krishak Praja leader Fazlul Haq, had made sure that by 1937 the provincial interests had prevailed over a specifically Muslim communal line within the domain of representative Muslim politics. The All-India Muslim League's dismal performance in the 1937 elections revealed the complete bankruptcy of any notion of an all-India Muslim 'interests'. The Muslim League, won only 109 out of 482 seats allotted to Muslims under separate electorates, securing only 4.8 per cent of the total Muslim votes despite attempts to project popular programmes. Congress was relatively more successful and formed ministries in a few provinces under provincial autonomy. It was the perceived threat from the singular and uncompromising 'nationalism' of the Congress to provincial autonomy and class interests which gave the discourse and politics of the Indian Muslims a fresh lease of life. The famous resolution passed at the Muslim League's Lahore session marked the transition of the Indian Muslims from a minority to a 'nation'. Jinnah made the demand that all future constitutional arrangements be reconsidered afresh since Indian Muslims were a 'nation' entitled to equal treatment with the Hindu 'nation'. But in attempting to give territorial expression to the Muslim claim to nationhood, Jinnah and a mainly minority province based All-India Muslim League had to make large concessions to the autonomy and sovereignty of the majority provinces. For Jinnah, religion was a political weapon to wrench his share of power. On the basis of the concept of 'Muslim nationalism' he argued that India was not homogeneous, but consisted of two nations, Hindus and Muslims. Muslim nationalism was operating on the same level as 'monolithic nationalism': beyond the religious Hindu-Muslim polarisation it did not recognise any further divisions. Congress had refused a coalition government with The Muslim League in U.P. in 1937 and in subsequent negotiations with the League Congress was not willing to accept itself as a Hindu political body or Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslims. The demands put forward in 1940s by league regarding a separate 'homeland' for the Muslims was not acceptable to secular Congress leaders.

31.8 CONGRESS AND THE SIKH MINORITY

The formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee provided a focal point for the movement for the reformation of the Sikh religious places and creation of Sikh religious identity. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee began controlling Gurdwaras one by one, but the trouble arose where the *mahants* were stubborn as they were shielded by law. Starting in late 1920, large number of reformers both in urban and rural Punjab had joined to form separate and independent groups called *jatha*, for gaining control over their local Gurdwaras. Leader of a *jatha* was called *jathedar* under whose command a *jatha* would occupy a shrine and try to gain transfer of management in its favour from its current incumbents. Sometimes the transfer went peacefully especially in the case of smaller Gurdwaras with less income resources, and sometimes with the threat of force. It enlisted the active support and sympathy of some of the important nationalist papers in the country like *The Independent* (English), *Swaraj* (Hindi), *The Tribune*, *Liberal*, *Kesari* (Punjabi), *Milap* (Urdu), *Samindar* (Urdu) and *Bande Mataram* (Hindi). Two of the vernacular dailies *Akali* (Punjabi.) and the *Akali-te-Pardesi* (Urdu) also played an important role. It brought the necessary

awakening among the Sikh masses and prepared them to undertake the struggle for reform. Master Tara Singh remained the editor of these two papers. With the direct and indirect support of the Central Sikh League, the Indian National Congress and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the Shiromani Akali Dal started a non-violent struggle against the government for the control of the Gurdwaras. In the agitation at Nankana Sahib Gurdwara, many agitators were killed and nationalist leaders including Gandhi visited the scene of the tragedy and expressed sympathy for the Akalis. Similarly Congress leaders also supported other Sikh agitation like Nabha agitation, the immediate cause for which was the deposition of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha. It was believed by the British that he was in sympathy with the Akali movement and was also considered to be too independent to suit their political needs. The Sikh leaders Master Tara Chand and Kharak Singh supported Non-Cooperation movement.

However, the political relations were not stable between Congress and Akalis. About the communal aspect of the report relating to Punjab, the Nehru Report had stated, "As regards the special claim of the Muslims and Sikhs for greater representation than their population would justify – it is enough to say that in the view we have expressed above, no such claim is admissible on the part of any community, however, important it may consider itself to be". The report accepted claims by the Muslims in the provinces where they were in minority while dismissed the Sikh claims on the basis that the Punjab problem is a peculiar one where there is the presence of the strong Hindu minority side by side with the Muslim majority and the Sikh minority. The report further said that "endless complications will arise if we recommend reservations for all minorities. The communal question is essentially a Hindu-Muslim question and must be settled on that basis". The Nehru Report deeply affected the politics of Punjab as it did not only cause disappointment to the Sikh community but was also responsible for the division among them especially over the communal clauses of it which provided for universal adult franchise in Punjab with no reservation of seats for the minorities, as was done in other states excepting Bengal, where the Muslims were in minority.

The Report became the root cause of acute differences between Master Tara Singh and Sardar Mangal Singh on one hand and Baba Kharak Singh and the Congress on the other hand. Master Tara Singh was the first Sikh leader to react sharply to the communal clauses and provisions of this report. He immediately expressed his resentment by sending a telegram to Moti Lal Nehru. Sardar Mangal Singh came in for severe criticism for having signed the report ignoring the Sikh interests. Mahatma Gandhi later tried to mollify the feelings of the Central Sikh League leadership. On December 30, 1928 while addressing the All Parties Conference he stated that personally he believed that the Nehru Report had not done justice to the Sikhs. Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Moti Lal Nehru, and M. A. Ansari met Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh and other Sikhs leaders before the start of the Congress session of Lahore (1929). They assured them that in the open session of the Congress; a resolution would be passed assuring the minorities, especially the Muslims and the Sikhs, that no such constitution would be promulgated in the country that would not satisfy the minorities. Such a resolution was passed in the Lahore Session of the Congress.

The Simon Commission favoured the separate electorate and reservation of seats and recommended only 19 per cent representation to the Sikhs in Punjab. The dispatch was strongly criticised by the Shiromani Akali Dal. As the Congress and the Sikh rejected the Simon report, the Viceroy called the Round Table Conferences from 1930 to 1932 to decide the future of India with the involvement of Indians. The first Round table Conference was boycotted by both the Congress and the Sikhs. After the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 5, 1931 Gandhi went to attend the second Round Table Conference on behalf of the Congress. Before going to London he met leaders of all communities, princes and leaders of important organisations. A Sikh deputation under the leadership of Master Tara Singh placed the Sikh point of view before him and stressed that the Sikhs being an important minority, required adequate safeguards in any future constitution. Important among them were the re-demarcation of Punjab territories by transferring overwhelming Muslim majority areas to the North West Frontier, joint electorate without reservation of seats and one third share for the Sikhs in the Punjab Cabinet and the Public Service Commission. In the absence of any acceptable solution for the communal problem, the British Government on August 16, 1932, gave its own verdict in the form of Communal Award. The Award made the position of Muslims in Punjab and Bengal strong. According to the Award the system of separate electorate was retained and the Award represented the three communities in Punjab as such that the Muslims got the statutory majority of seven seats in Punjab while the Hindus and the Sikhs gained nothing. The Sikhs were very agitated over the issue, there was a lot of anger against the Loyalist Sikhs, but on this issue even the loyalists gave strong statements in the press, which further encouraged the Sikhs. Previously, on July 24, 1932, a Sikh conference representing the Akali Dal and the Central Sikh League was called at Lahore, which rejected the proportion of seats allocated to the Sikh as unacceptable. It voiced its grim determination not to allow the successful working of any constitution, which does not provide full protection to the Sikhs by guaranteeing an effective balance of power to each of the three principal communities in the Punjab. During the entire period till Independence and Partition, Congress and Sikhs minority relation was turbulent. At the time of Independence, however, the Congress Party assured Tara Singh, Baldev Singh and other Sikh leaders that India would belong to all its religious communities, and the Constitution would be secular and tried to win them over.

31.9 SUMMARY

We find that the relationship between various minorities and national movement was never an easy one. It passed through various phases and it was full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Sometimes Congress tried to win them over with political concessions. But the belief that British were fostering these divisions and a simplistic way to paper over internal contradictions in the name of a singular national identity proved that there were various possibilities. The formation of a national identity involved negotiations and contestations. These were manifested especially in the relationship between Congress as the representative of national consciousness and various political formations claiming to represent and articulate the interests of various religious and social minorities.

31.10 EXERCISES

1) Evaluate the relationship between Congress and Muslim minority from the formation of Congress in 1885 to 1914.

2) Discuss the orientation of Muslim politics and its relationship with the Congress since the Lucknow Pact till the partition.

2) Describe the progress in the relation between Congress and the Sikhs represented by the Akali leadership.

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Indian National Movement

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Block

8

NATIONAL MOVEMENT: LEGACIES

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BLOCK 8 NATIONAL MOVEMENT: LEGACIES

Indian nationalist movement, as broadly recognized, was among the greatest movements in history. Covering a large area, involving a huge number of people, and negotiating with a wide variety of ideologies, this movement was successful not only in establishing an independent nation-state but also in leaving a rich legacy of thought and practice for the new nation. In this final block of the course, we will take an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian nationalist movement.

In **Unit 32**, you will read about the strategy evolved by the nationalist movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to fight against the biggest and most successful imperial power in the history. The British colonial state in India was not a fully authoritarian state. It was a semi-authoritarian and semi-hegemonic state which relied both on force and consent. It followed a certain level of legal path and was influenced by the public opinion. To fight against this kind of state, the nationalist movement adopted the strategy of non-violent mass struggle accompanied by the acceptance of piecemeal gain. Although this Gandhian strategy faced some challenges, it nevertheless remained the principle mode of struggle against the colonial state.

While the strategy of its struggle against the colonial power achieved success, the nationalist movement partially failed to contain the spectre of communalism which led to the partition of the country. **Unit 33** discusses the emergence of distinct religious communities in the nineteenth century and the development of mass communalism during the first half of the twentieth century. While the nationalist movement was able to contain the Hindu Mahasabha, it failed to bring a large number of Muslims within its folds and thereby neutralise the Muslim League. The phenomenal growth of the Muslim League in the 1930s and 1940s on the plank of hard communalism could not be countered effectively by the Congress. This was because the Congress did not follow a consistent strategy to tackle communalism and its responses varied according to situation.

One of the greatest achievements of the Indian nationalist leadership is the Indian Constitution which embodies the basic humanitarian and democratic values imbibed and developed during the nationalist movement. Ideals of democracy, individual rights, equality, liberty and secularism are enshrined in Indian Constitution. In **Unit 34**, we will discuss the important phases through which the Constitution was conceived and its modalities were worked out. Although the process of the constitution-making began since 1858, it was the Nehru Report in 1928 and finally the Constituent Assembly which determined the shape of Indian Constitution.

In **Unit 35**, you will learn about the important legacies left behind by the nationalist movement for the people of independent India. Territorial and non-coercive nationalism, large-scale participation of the common people in democratic processes, India's own version of secularism, commitment to civil liberties and an independent foreign policy were the most significant contributions of the movement to the post-independent polity. However, certain fissiparous tendencies which the nationalist movement could not do away with also survive till the present day. Thus, we can say that the nationalist movement had an enormous impact on the making of post-independent polity and society.

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UNIT 32 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND ITS STRATEGIES*

Structure

32.1 Introduction

32.2 Did the National Movement Have a Strategy?

32.3 The Nature of Colonial State

32.4 Making of the Gandhian Strategy

32.5 Essence of the Gandhian Strategy

32.6 Gandhian Strategy: Some General Observations

32.7 Alternative Strategic Visions

32.8 Summary

32.9 Exercises

32.1 INTRODUCTION

A prolonged political movement can be studied by focusing on six major components – political objectives, programme and ideology, strategy, leadership, social base and class character. All the six components are important. Even though each one is connected to the other, none is a substitute or can be reduced to the other. The importance of the strategy for a prolonged struggle, such as the Indian National Movement, was immense. It provided continuity to the different phases of the struggle. The British imperialism was a complex phenomenon and could not be fought in a simple one-to-one combat. It required an elaborate set of techniques. The techniques had to be flexible enough to change according to the change in time and context. Yet the techniques had to be enduring and sustained enough to survive a mere change in the leadership. It is interesting that the change in leadership of the Movement did not necessarily bring about a change in the strategy. This Unit addresses itself to some salient questions pertaining to the strategy of the national movement.

32.2 DID THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT HAVE A STRATEGY?

On this question there have been two extreme views expressed in the various history writings. Interestingly both the views have denied either the importance or the very existence of a strategy for the movement. There was a traditional view often found in the nationalist history writings which highlighted the role of ideas and idealism, courage and sacrifices as the crucial elements in the movement. The assumption was that the freedom won in 1947 was primarily the product of courage, conviction and selfless sacrifice displayed by the leaders and their followers. Such a view obviously ignored the role of strategy in the movement.

The view on the other extreme was exemplified by some of the writings from the Cambridge School of history writing. This School often saw the movement

* Resource Person: Prof. Salil Misra

not as a "whole" but divided into multiple activities and interests. This was a fragmentary view of the national movement which did not see the movement as connected in time and space. So according to this view, the earlier phase of the movement was not connected to the latter phase and the political energies generated were concentrated at the local, provincial and the all-India levels. These levels often flowed into different directions. Also political activities were inspired not so much by ideas but 'interests'. In other words, the Cambridge School tended to develop a picture of the movement which was an assemblage of multiple fragments and interests, and not as a connected structured whole. Even such a view will obviously not look at strategy as a significant component of the movement.

As against these two views, the real discussion on strategy developed in some of the Marxian writings on the Movement, particularly those of Bipan Chandra. He argued that the movement as a whole was connected in time and space. It accommodated within itself multiple activities, techniques and tactics. But the movement, particularly in the Gandhian phase, was marked by the presence of a centralised strategic framework. This strategic framework performed an axial role during the course of the movement. It is therefore very important to focus on strategy as a crucial component of the national movement.

32.4 THE NATURE OF COLONIAL STATE

There is a strong co-relation between the nature of the State and the range of strategic options that can be employed against that State. The manner in which power is acquired and exercised is crucial for the manner in which that power can be challenged. In other words, the question of strategy can be understood better if we place it in the context of the nature of the colonial State in India.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), the leading Italian Marxist thinker, gave us the clue to the relationship between the nature of the State and the nature of the struggles against it. Gramsci was grappling with a very important issue in Marxian thinking. He was wondering why the Bolshevik-type revolution, which succeeded in Tsarist Russia, did not appear likely to succeed in the capitalist democratic societies of Western Europe. His search for an answer to this question led him to focus on the nature of the State, as the main clue to the answer. He then argued that the nature of State in Western European societies was basically different from the Tsarist Russia and therefore the revolutionary struggle in these societies would have to be of a different nature. He divided the main strategies of struggle against state power into a war of manoeuvre (WoM) and a war of position (WoP). He argued that if power was heavily concentrated within the State, then WoM would be successful against it. This was the case for instance in Tsarist Russia, in which it was possible to smash state power in one blow. But in situations in which power was more diffused among various institutions and the State was fortified by a complex system of multiple 'trenches', the WoM will not be effective and a different strategy will be required. The 20th century capitalist societies were societies of this kind. This, according the Gramsci, was the main reason why socialist revolutions had not been successful in such situations. For such situations, Gransci recommended the strategy of WoP.

All States in history had ruled with the help of a combination of 'force' and 'consent'. No State had ruled exclusively and solely on the basis of naked force.

However in the modern states, force became more diffused and the area of consent became enlarged. Modern capitalist states ruled by creating a 'rule of law' which became a major source of legitimacy. This legitimacy enabled modern capitalist states to create zones of consent. In other words modern capitalist states ruled through 'hegemony' which was a combination of force and consent. Against such a hegemonic state, in which a large part of the society stood behind the state, the strategy of violent overthrow (as happened in Tsarist Russia) would not be possible. Instead, in such situations it would be more useful to resort to a 'war of position' i.e., a bit by bit struggle carried out in phases for small victories which would then be accumulated so as to turn into a grand success. Gramsci also called it 'trench warfare'. A favourable situation for a war of position is when the "consciousness of material impotence on the part of the great mass confronts a minority of oppressors". This would be a long-term struggle which would initially start from a situation of imbalance, in which the enemy would be stronger. But the strategy for war of position will seek to change this situation in stages.

It is interesting that although Gramsci had specified the strategy of WoP as effective against the democratic capitalist states, he was able to see that this strategy was being employed in the Indian national Movement. Even though he was in jail and would have had very limited exposure to the world outside, still he noticed some of the distinctive features of the Gandhi-led-struggle in howsoever limited a manner. Gramsci wrote in his Prison Diary:

'Thus India's political struggle against the English knows three forms of war: war of movement, war of positions and underground warfare. Gandhi's passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare. Boycotts are a form of war of position, strikes of war of movement, the secret preparations of weapons and combat troops belongs to underground warfare'.

What is the relevance of Granscian thinking for our discussion of the Strategy of the national movement? He had in mind two models of state power – the authoritarian model of a state with power concentrated directly within the state and the model of democratic European societies with power diffused and dispersed among multiple institutions. Interestingly the colonial state in India was different from both these types.

Although Gransci gave us the important conceptual category of 'war of position' for the dominant strategy for the national movement, he did not really specify the exact conditions in which the WoP was to be carried out. He also did not take up the question of violence and non-violence. It was here that Gandhian practice took this debate forward. Gandhi broadly agreed with the Marxian position that the State was an instrument of organised violence. But he did see the 20th century State as much more entrenched which could not be overthrown by a violent armed struggle. He wrote: "British domination has been as much sustained by British arms as it has been through the legislatures, distribution of titles, the law courts, the educational institutions, the financial policy and the like." All these had created some areas of consent which necessitated a non-violent struggle.

Gandhi had started developing his understanding of the British colonial state during his encounters with it in South Africa. During his Satyagraha in South

Africa, Gandhi experienced that there was a powerful public opinion in England, capable of influencing government decisions. Gandhi developed an admiration for the British democracy. At the same time he also noticed powerful conservative elements in British thinking. He is reported to have said sometime before the First World War: "The British are said to love liberty for themselves and for others....but they have a faculty for self-delusion that no other nation has." He also added a quality he admired among English people: "I have found Englishmen amenable to reason and persuasion and as they always wish to appear, it is easier to shame them than others into doing the right thing." (Quoted in B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics*, p. 68).

The presence of seemingly contradictory strands in British thinking has been articulated very succinctly by D.A. Low. He has called it an ambiguity between the dominant strands of self-image among the British. One was a liberal-democratic strand and the other was a conservative-imperialist one. On the one hand the British saw themselves as the leaders of the world who had the responsibility for promoting democracy and self-government in the world. At the same time there was also a conservative-imperialist self-image that fed into some of the policy decisions. In this self-image, colonies, particularly India, were seen as an important and integral component of the British Empire. It was believed that, minus the colonies, Great Britain would be easily reduced to a little Britain. Both the strands of thought were present in British thinking and policy making towards India. Therefore sometimes concessions were made (as in 1917 declaring self-government as the goal of British policy in India and in the Government of India Act of 1935 granting provincial autonomy). But on other occasions very repressive measures were also adopted (as in the Jalianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919 and the suppression of nationalist agitations after 1932 and in 1942).

This duality in British thinking and in policy formulation was articulated very well by Viceroy Ripon, when he said: "There are two policies lying before the choice of the Government of India; the one is the policy of those who have established a free press, who have promoted education, who have admitted natives more and more largely to the public service in various forms, and who have favoured the extension of self-government; the other side is that of those who hate the freedom of the press, who dread the progress of education, and who watch with jealousy and alarm everything which tends, in however limited a degree, to give the natives of India a larger share in the management of their own affairs." (S.R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of Indian National Congress*, pp. 305-06).

It is clear that Gandhi was acutely aware of this aspect of the British rule and incorporated it in the strategy he formulated vis-a-vis British imperialism.

32.4 MAKING OF THE GANDHIAN STRATEGY

Gandhian strategy of the anti-imperialist struggle was not codified in one place in the form of a blue-print or a manifesto. It was not prepared before the struggle was launched. It evolved in a process taking cognizance of current experiences and incorporating them in a strategic framework. Gandhian strategy was based on his understanding of the British rule and also his experiences in South Africa. His strategy of non-violent non-cooperation was borne out of his basic disenchantment with the existing nationalist politics. He understood the

limitations of the politics of Indian Moderates, based as it was on constitutional methods. Such a politics had its own limits. It could easily be co-opted through the offers of concessions. At any rate such a politics was based on the premise of a good will on the part of the rulers. The futility of such politics was demonstrated during the struggle against the partition of Bengal in which during 1903-05 the Moderate leaders made a plea to the British not to partition Bengal. Some of them hoped, quite naively, that once the British were convinced that there was an overwhelming consensus against the partition plan, they would see reason and not go ahead with their proposed partition. However none of that happened and the Moderate leaders themselves began to see the futility of their political techniques. The other alternative was underground political violence. Such politics emanated from the Swadeshi movement when many young people in Bengal, disillusioned with the failure of the Swadeshi movement, began to explore the option of political violence. The politics of underground violence was tried out in Bengal and was suppressed by the British.

Gandhi saw the futility of both these techniques. He was therefore searching for an alternative to both the extremes, which would avoid the pitfalls of both. He found the answer in non-violent non-co-operation. His non-cooperation was posited against the Moderate techniques which were ineffective at best and also ran the risk of being co-opted. And his non-violence was posited against the methods of violent revolutionaries, which could not last long and would eventually be suppressed. However in treating non-violence as a part of his strategy of struggle, one should not underplay his total and uncompromising commitment to non-violence. Non-violence was an effective strategy for the movement, but for Gandhi its significance was much more than purely strategic. He was fully committed to it and convinced of its moral superiority.

While discussing the making of Gandhian strategy, one has to refer to the struggle Gandhi launched in South Africa during 1908-14 against the discrimination practised by the South African government against the Indian population there. It is interesting that Gandhi tried all the techniques in South Africa before practising them in India. Gandhi set up a Press "International Printing Press" in Pretoria in 1904. He started a journal *Indian Opinion* in Johannesburg before starting *Young India* and *Harijan* in India. He set up two Ashrams in South Africa – Phoenix and Tolstoy, before setting up Ashrams in Ahmedabad and in Wardha. During his Satyagraha in South Africa, Gandhi practised non-cooperation, boycott and also took a long march from Natal to Transvaal along the lines of his famous Dandi march in 1930 as part of his Salt Satyagraha. He also showed willingness for a pact or a negotiation with the government of South Africa. The only weapon he did not try in South Africa was the fast. Fasting as a political method was tried out by Gandhi for the first time in 1918 during his leadership of the strike by the Ahmedabad Mill Workers.

After returning to India Gandhi wrote an important book *Satyagraha in South Africa*, in which he spelt out the basic outline of his technique of Satyagraha. He presented Satyagraha as an effective technique against any act of tyranny. In an essay in his journal *Young India* in 1924, he defined Satyagraha in the following words:

'Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience are but different branches of the same tree called *Satyagraha*. It is my *Kalpadruma* [a sacred tree, according to Hindu

mythology, which fulfils all the desires] – my *Jam-i-Jam* [a divine cup according to Islamic mythology] – the universal provider. Satyagraha is search for truth; and God is truth. Ahimsa or non-violence is the light that reveals that Truth to me. *Swaraj* for me is part of that Truth. This *Satyagraha* did not fail me in South Africa, Kheda or Champaran and in a host of other cases I could mention. It excludes all violence or hate .... I have repeatedly stated that Satyagraha never fails and that one perfect Satyagrahi is enough to vindicate Truth.....Satyagraha is an attribute of the spirit within. It is latent in every one of us. Like *Swaraj*, it is our birth right'.

To sum up this section, Gandhian strategy did not exist at any point in time in the form of a fully finished blue-print. It was constantly evolving with new elements being added to it. While understanding the process in which his strategy was shaping up, two factors – his dissatisfaction with the entire range of the existing nationalist politics and experiences in South Africa, need to be kept in mind.

32.5 ESSENCE OF THE GANDHIAN STRATEGY

It was primarily under Gandhi that the national movement acquired a clear-cut and long-term strategic framework. It was clear-cut because there were to be no ambiguities and confusions. It was long-term in the sense that it was not confined to any single episode or activity. All the different activities were connected to each other through a common strategy. The strategy was not to throw out British imperialism, but to create such conditions as to make it impossible for them to stay on in India. In other words, it was to be a strategy, not of the removal of imperialism through one big push, but through a prolonged struggle, carried out in various phases. The essence of Gandhian strategy can be understood better from a quote from Bipan Chandra:

The basic strategic perspective of the Indian National Congress was to wage a long-drawn out hegemonic struggle or in Gramscian terms a war of position – a struggle for the minds and hearts of men and women, constantly expanding its influence among the people through different channels and its different movements and phases or stages. The strategy had two basic thrusts. It was hegemonic and it alternated between phases of extra legal mass struggle and phases of truce functioning within the four walls of the law or in Gramscian terms between phases of war of manoeuvre and war of position. But both phases were geared to expanding the influence of the national movement among the people. The basic strategy was the same, but the tactics differed in different phases and over time. It was, moreover, not a strategy of gradual reform or 'compromise' with colonialism or of seeking co-option into it or of 'sharing' power and privilege with it. It was a strategy of active struggle by building reserves of hegemonic power with a view to wresting political power from the colonial state. Even though it represented an alternative not only to the path of armed struggle but in many ways also to the Leninist strategic framework, it shared with the latter a common strategic objective, the capture of state power. (Bipan Chandra, *Indian National Movement: The Long-Term Dynamics*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 40).

One necessary pre-condition for practising this strategy was to find out the nature of the adversary. Gandhi understood that the British did not rule India through pure force and coercion. They ruled India by trying to capture the minds and

hearts of the Indian people. In other words they tried to rule India by trying to establish their hegemony. The role of the national movement therefore was to try and erode the hegemony established by the British and establish a counter hegemony of the national movement, and to wage a struggle for the minds and hearts of the people.

The British established their hegemony in two major ways – by proving the benevolence of the British rule and by establishing its invincibility. The entire duration of the national movement – from the early to the Gandhian phase – was essentially a sustained demolition of the twin notions of British benevolence and British invincibility. The early nationalist leadership tried to counter the notion of the British benevolence with the idea of economic nationalism, i.e., that idea that the British rule was against the economic interests of Indian people as a whole. The Movement in its Gandhian phase built on this and tried to erode the invincibility of the British rule by successfully carrying out agitations against it. The following may be treated as some of the essential ingredients in the Gandhian strategy of struggle against British imperialism:

- It was based on acquiring a proper and scientific understanding of the nature of the adversary. Gandhi was quite clear that not all strategies can be effective in all situations. He understood that the colonial state in India was different from Hitler's Germany or Tsarist Russia. It was semi-authoritarian or based on a kind of legal authoritarianism. British rule was based on force but also on the creation of certain civil institutions. British created constitutional spaces and were also ready to offer concessions at times. Moreover it was a government which was accountable to British parliament and a vigilant public opinion in England. This nature of the British rule, and its understanding by Gandhi, played some role in the formulation of the specific Gandhian strategy against it. Gandhi was clear that the same strategy of counter hegemonic straggle may not be equally effective in all situations, and the strategies had to be context-specific.

- The struggle was to be fought with the help of the masses. The major strength of the Movement was to come from the masses and not from the intelligentsia or any particular class or any trained cadre. This required practicing the politics of class adjustment as against that of class-conflict. It was often not easy to reconcile the interests of conflicting classes involved in the same struggle. Reconciling the national interests with the class interests often became a very challenging task during the course of the Movement. People, including the peasants and workers were to be mobilized on an anti-imperialist plank.

- Masses were to be mobilised on some strong moral basis. Racial or religious issues were avoided in campaigns of mass mobilisations. Khilafat movement was more of an exception than a rule. Two important moral issues, which were taken up, were the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 and the Salt Satyagraha in 1930. The choice of raising important moral issues and avoiding strictly racial or religious issues was very significant. It ensured that the Movement did not degenerate into counter-racialism against the British people. Also the Movement enjoyed considerable support in British society and Media which often took up the Indian cause. The avoiding of religious issues was also necessary to ensure that the Movement did not take up the grievances of one religious community against another.

- The Movement was a continuous struggle but was to be fought through different stages. It alternated between phases of struggle and those of truce. Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn in 1922 and was followed by a prolonged period of constructive programme. It consisted of promotion of Khadi and spinning, promoting village industries, creating alternative national education, working for communal unity and harmony, struggle against untouchability, and boycott of foreign goods and liquor. Likewise the end of the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement in 1934 was followed by a constitutional phase in which Congress contested elections to provincial assemblies and formed a government in seven provinces. Thus phases of open confrontation with the authority were alternated by phases of working within the existing legal and constitutional framework.

  One major reason for carrying out the struggle in different phases was realisation by Gandhi that masses did not have inexhaustible reserves of energy and that they needed a break from active phases of struggle. Their capacity for making sacrifices (heavy fines, imprisonment, loss of jobs, loss of land among other) was finite and could not be taken for granted. Bipan Chandra writes: "…by its very nature a mass movement could not be carried on or sustained indefinitely for even for a prolonged period, that a mass movement must ebb sooner or later, that no mass movement could be on the rise permanently, that mass movements had to be short-lived, and that period of rest and consolidation, of 'breathing time' must intervene so that the movement could consolidate, recuperate and gather strength for the next round of struggle." (Bipan Chandra, *Indian National Movement*, p. 51). However, the fact that the struggle was launched in phases, should not be taken to mean that there a break between phases or that the broad objectives of the Movement did not carry from one phase to the other. Gandhi himself pointed out many times that it was essentially *one* struggle and would continue till the final objective was met. After the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement, he wrote: "..suspension of civil disobedience does not mean suspension of war. The latter can only end when India has a Constitution of her own making."

- Yet another aspect of the strategy was to occupy and capture whatever space was released by the British. In this manner power was not to be claimed in one go but bit-by-bit. So once the constitutional arena was opened up, however slowly and in a limited manner, it was utilized by the Movement after the Government of India Act of 1919 offering Dyarchy and after the Act of 1935 offering provincial autonomy. The idea was to extend the national movement to various spheres of socio-political life. So, just as the national movement entered villages through Gandhi's constructive programme, it also entered the legislative bodies through its constitutional activities. All these diverse activities were connected to each other through a common strategy.

- Finally, insistence on non-violence was very central to the strategy of the Movement. It was considered necessary that a prolonged struggle by the masses – as against a cadre-based underground movement – had to be non-violent. The human cost of mass participation in a violent struggle could be very high. Also a violent movement would find it difficult to mobilise masses on a sustained basis. It may be therefore argued that non-violence enabled

the Movement to acquire a wider support and a mass base. It should thus be clear that for the Movement it was a strategic necessity. Gandhi himself explained the strategic relevance of non-violence to his followers before starting his famous Dandi March in March 1930:

"Though the battle is to begin in a couple of days, how is it that you can come so fearlessly? I do not think any of you would be here if you had to face rifle-shots or bombs? But you have no fear of rifle-shots or bombs. Why? Supposing I had announced that I was going to launch a violent campaign, not necessarily with men armed with rifles, but even with sticks or stones, do you think the Government would have left me free until now? Can you show me an example in history (be it in England, America or Russia) where the state has tolerated violent defiance of authority for a single day? But here you know that the Government is puzzled and perplexed." (Quoted in Mridula Mukherjee, 'Introduction', in Sudhir Ghosh, *Gandhi's Emissary*, New Delhi, 2008, pp. xix-xx).

32.6 GANDHIAN STRATEGY: SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Once we begin to recognize the presence of a centralised strategic framework, we can also begin to see the link between the diverse sets of activities of the national movement. The focus on strategy also enables us to offer a fresh perspective on some of the contentious and controversial aspects of the Movement. In particular two major political decisions taken by Gandhi – withdrawal of the movement after violence in Chauri Chaura in 1922 and Gandhi –Irvin Pact signed in 1931 – have aroused considerable debate, both during their times and in subsequent history writings.

The withdrawal of the non cooperation movement after violence at Chauri Chaura has been understood in different ways. In its own times, it was considered to be a matter of political choice between violence and non-violence. Given Gandhi's uncompromising stand on this question, it was believed to be at the heart of Gandhi's decision to call off the movement. Leading Marxist historian R.P. Dutt looked at this question very differently. In his view, it indicated and confirmed the 'bourgeois' character of the Movement because Gandhi did not want the Movement to go out of control and turn against the propertied classes. Sumit Sarkar, in his article "The Logic of Gandhian Nationalism", explained the Gandhi-Irvin Pact by invoking the class character of the Movement. According to him, the Pact was signed because there was considerable pressure exercised by the capitalist class and the Pact was intended to protect the interests of the capitalist class. It was also the fear of the movement getting out of control, and the preference for a 'controlled mass movement' (as against a spontaneous mass movement), which was seen as the real reason behind many decisions taken by the leadership. These explanations were then generalized to construct an over-all picture of the national movement, supposedly fought under the control of the dominant capitalist class.

However, alternative explanations and generalisations can be found if we turn the searchlight towards 'strategy' as a crucial element behind various decisions taken by Gandhi. Withdrawing a phase of the Movement can then be seen as an integral part of Gandhian strategy. Also, constantly exploring the space for the

possibility of a truce or a settlement was also a part of the same strategy. As Gandhi himself said: "An honest satyagrahi should always be ready for a honourable settlement." Pacts and settlements were always an essential ingredient in Gandhian strategy.

Chauri Chaura was the last time Gandhi withdrew the movement citing violence as the main reason. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, there were instances of violence in Sholapur and also in some pockets in the North West Frontier Province. But Gandhi did not withdraw the struggle. The Quit India movement had turned violent as a whole. But Gandhi refused to condemn this violence on the ground that this violence was a reaction to the much larger violence inflicted by the colonial state.

However, while focusing on 'strategy' as an important component of the Movement, it is necessary not to look upon it as fixed or frozen. No blueprint of the strategy existed. It was never formally codified by Gandhi at any point. The strategy actually grew with practice. In this sense, the leaders of the Movement were teachers and learners at the same time. They were educating the participants of the struggle even as they were learning about it. The leaders were constantly experimenting, growing, changing and learning from previous experiences. All these, rather than any pre-existing codified doctrine, were the building blocks in the making of the strategy.

It was perhaps the essence of Gandhian strategy that the ultimate objective – overthrow of British imperialism – was not achieved in a sledge hammer way, but so gradually and in such a phased manner that the actual coming of independence did not appear very dramatic and spectacular. This aspect of Gandhian strategy was spelt out beautifully by the contemporary British historian Arnold Toynbee: "He [Gandhi] made it impossible for the British to go on ruling India, but at the same time he made it possible for us to abdicate without rancour and without dishonour.... In helping the British extricate themselves from this [imperial] entanglement, Gandhi did them a signal service for it is easier to acquire an empire than to disengage from one." (Quoted in B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics*, p. 71).

32.7 ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIC VISIONS

Gandhi's was the dominant strategy of the anti-imperialist struggle; but it was not the only one. During the course of Gandhi's leadership over the movement, there also existed rival and contending ideas of how to struggle against British imperialism.

One major challenge to the mainstream Gandhian strategy came from Jawaharlal Nehru, particularly in the 1930s. This was the period when Nehru was getting increasingly disillusioned with Gandhi's politics and growing distant from him. Nehru began to be very inspired by socialist ideas and grew convinced that the future choice for the entire world was between "some form of Communism and some form of Fascism". He became convinced about the desirability of Communism at a global level. At a national level, however, he looked upon the anti-imperialist struggle as an important pre-condition for the emergence of Socialism. Nehru travelled through the country, met many people, and was convinced that since 1857 there had never been such extraordinary bitterness

among the Indian people against British government, and such a passionate desire to get rid of it. This for Nehru was a revolutionary moment and he felt that this revolutionary mood was being distracted by Gandhi's focus on rural uplift and Harijan movement around 1933-34. Nehru was convinced that the moment for the big social transformation had arrived. British rule could be overthrown; the autocratic system of princely states would end; land system would be changed; and industries would be brought under public control. All this could be achieved in a short span of time. The removal of British imperialism would ignite the spark and other things would happen through a Domino effect. This was a radically different perspective and it brought Nehru to a brink of a political separation from Gandhi.

Briefly, the outline of Nehru's alternative strategy consisted of the following: The anti-imperialist struggle had reached a stage when there should be uncompromising and sustained confrontation with imperialism till it was overthrown. There could be no compromise or any setback on this. There could be no meeting ground and no reversion either to constitutionalism or to Gandhian constructive work. It was for this reason that Nehru was completely opposed to Congressmen forming governments in provinces under the Government of India Act, 1935. He saw it as a compromise with imperialism. Nehru's strategy was basically one of seizure of power, albeit through a non-violent mass struggle.

However Nehru knew that Gandhi did not share his worldview and soon discovered that it would be difficult to convert Gandhi to his position. He also underestimated Gandhi's influence on the Congress. Nehru realized that he would not be able to convert Congress to his new worldview. Therefore in order to push his revolutionary project, he would have to abandon the Congress. In this project Nehru had the support of some Socialist Congress leaders, who had formed a Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in 1934. But Nehru also discovered that apart from a revolutionary project, he did not share very much in common with the Congress Socialists. Thus, Nehru's alternative strategy remained only on paper and in Nehru's thoughts and writings. It could not transform into a social force. Nehru did not have the organisational resources and did not want to abandon Congress as the vehicle for the anti-imperialist struggle. Nehru also realised that his pushing for an alternative strategy might split the Congress and the Movement. And Nehru was not ready to split up the anti-imperialist forces. After contemplating his alternative strategy during the early part of 1930s, Nehru eventually came around to accepting Gandhian strategy from 1937 onwards and agreed to fight the struggle more or less on terms stipulated by Gandhi.

There were other occasions when challenges were thrown up to Gandhi's leadership and strategy. For instance Subhash Chandra Bose tried, as Congress president in 1938 and 1939, to alter the trajectory of the anti-imperialist struggle. The conflict that followed resulted in Bose's alienation from the Congress and eventually his expulsion from Congress and his forming a separate 'Forward Block'. But without a doubt, Nehru's was the most serious attempt to challenge the dominant Gandhian strategy. As it happened, no major breaks occurred in the Congress strategy and the national movement continued to be fought under Gandhi's leadership following his strategy.

32.8 SUMMARY

The Indian nationalist movement, particularly during the Gandhian phase, was fought with the help of a clear-cut, long-term strategy. Gandhi was the architect of this strategy. The various changes, which occurred in the activities and the tactics of the Movement, were carried out broadly *within* the same strategy. This strategy did not exist in an *a priori* manner. Nor was there a ready-made blueprint for it. It grew and evolved with experiences. It was also not codified in any single piece of writing by Gandhi. Yet there are many indications (in Gandhi's writings, in his activities and also in the writings of some of his contemporaries) that Gandhi was pursuing the Movement with an acute sense of strategy.

This was a strategy not of a direct overthrow of imperialism, but of a prolonged bit-by-bit struggle, conducted in many phases. The main objective of the strategy was to create such conditions in which the British would find it impossible to rule India and would be compelled to leave. This strategy was partly a result of the nature of British imperialism in India, and an acute understanding of that nature by the leadership of the Movement. The British did not rule India with brute force but in a semi-authoritarian manner, by creating a support base among Indians and by trying to reach out to their minds and hearts. As against this, the strategy of the national movement was to try to erode the hegemony of the colonial rulers and replace it with the counter-hegemony of the national movement.

Non-violent struggle, active participation of the masses, struggle to be launched in stages, phases of agitation to be alternated with phases of constructive programme, readiness for a settlement or a compromise (as in Gandhi-Irwin pact of 1931), making use of whatever constitutional spaces that were released by the British, constantly enlarging the orbit of the national movement to newer groups and areas, were some of the essential components of the Gandhian strategy.

This strategic framework of Gandhi received the most serious challenge from Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1930s. He proposed an alternative strategy of one big round of struggle against imperialism without any breaks, retreats or compromises till imperialism was overthrown. Such a militant struggle, according to Nehru, would also prepare the Indian society for a radical transformation of the social order along socialist lines. However, Nehru soon realised that there was not enough support for his strategy within Congress and that his pushing for an alternative might split the Congress and the anti-imperialist movement. Nehru also realised that Congress was the most effective platform for the anti-imperialist struggle and that any weakening of the Congress would also weaken the struggle. Therefore Nehru did not push his alternative vision to the point of the break and, by 1937, retreated by agreeing to fight British imperialism within the parameters of the Gandhian strategy of struggle.

32.9 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the nature of the state in colonial India.

2) Describe the Gandhian strategy to fight against imperialism in India.

3) What were other strategies which were presented as alternatives to the Gandhian strategy?

UNIT 33 NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM*

Structure

33.1 Introduction

33.2 The Communal Problem

33.3 Communal Problem and the Nationalist Movement

33.4 The Congress Approach Towards the Communal Problem

33.5 An Appraisal of the Congress Approach

33.6 Jawaharlal Nehru and Communalism

33.7 Summary

33.8 Exercises

33.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit is on the experiences of the nationalist leadership with the communal problem. It talks about how the nationalist leadership understood the communal question and what attempts it made to deal with the communal question. It will familiarise you with the central position which the communal problem acquired throughout the life of the nationalist movement and how a handling of the communal question became a virtual pre-condition to the successful operation of the nationalist struggle. The Unit begins with an overview of communalism as it emerged in Indian society and politics from the 19th century onwards. It then goes into the question of the relationship of communalism with the nationalist movement. It describes the various efforts made by the Congress leadership to come to terms with the communal problem. It also examines and evaluates the efforts of the Congress leadership and their relevance. Finally it focuses on Jawaharlal Nehru and his handling of the communal question.

33.2 THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM

The 19th century in Indian history was a period of a great transformation. Never before had changes taken place at such a pace and with such intensity. The British rule established itself very firmly and began to penetrate the interiors of the Indian society. This was also the period of the emergence of the modern industrial economy, mobility and dislocation.

Under the impact of these monumental changes, the traditional social structure too began to undergo transformation. The story of the kind of changes that came about has been mentioned in M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*. In a nutshell, India's community structure went through a process of dissolution and reconfiguration. India's traditional community structure was generally marked by plurality and syncretism. A large number of small and local communities existed with fuzzy and porous dividing lines. In particular, in as far as religious

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life was concerned, there was considerable syncretism and overlap between various religious communities. For pre-19th century Indian society, it was not possible to talk of *A Hindu community* or *A Muslim community*. It would be more appropriate to refer to multiple Hindu communities, multiple Muslim communities, and multiple communities that were both at the same time. Religious life was lived more at a ritualistic level. The impact of doctrine or centralized tenets was, at best minimal in the lives of ordinary Hindus and Muslims. In other words the religious life of common people was marked less by centralized doctrines and scriptures and more by local rituals and folk practices. The general religious traditions of popular Hinduism and popular Islam did not appear very divergent from each other. There are any number of examples to corroborate this thesis from Bengal and Punjab, two important regions with a Muslim majority. For both these regions, it has been recorded by scholars that the influence of high scholastic Islam was very minimal and that of low, Sufi and syncretic Islam, very deep and pervasive. This was also true of Hindus and other communities.

Broadly speaking, the mammoth changes in the 19th century began to alter India's community profile in two directions. On the one hand, a national community of Indian people, cutting across region, religion and culture, began to be formed. On the other, the diverse raw material of Indian religious communities began to give way to internally standardized, externally differentiated, neatly segregated, pan-Indian communities of Hindus and Muslims. In other words, something like a Hindu community with an all-India consciousness and a Muslim community with a similar all-India consciousness began to emerge. Their religious differences became sharp and those of culture, language and region began to become relatively less important. New differences also got invented.

It is necessary to emphasize here that this altered community profile was a product of 19th century transformation. It is important to recognize the empirical reality of the making of pan-Indian religious communities. It is however equally important to recognize that they did not always exist. India's community profile at the beginning of the 19th century was dramatically different from what it became at the beginning of the 20th century.

This development was extremely conducive for the growth of the communal politics. By communalism, we refer to an ideology that sought to transform religious communities into political constituencies. Two different but inter-connected processes were involved in the politics of communalism: 1) Creation of pan-Indian communities of Hindus and Muslims; and 2) placing of these communities at the service of large political mobilizations.

The communal politics, which developed at the beginning of the 20th century, was initially confined to the tiny elite minority of the society. The wider public was untouched by it. However, by the 1920s, this politics began to influence the middle classes. By the late 1930s and 40s, it also acquired a mass base. The kind of demands raised from the platform of the communal politics, easily confirms its class character in different phases. In the initial elite phase, the major demand was for reservation of seats in the legislative bodies. By 1920s, this demand was enlarged to include reservation of jobs and protection of culture and language of religious communities. However, from the late 1930s onwards, communalism began to acquire a mass base. It was during this period that Muslim League, the communal organisation claiming to represent the Muslims, began to argue that

lives of all Muslims were unsafe in India and that they could live with dignity only if they had a separate homeland of their own.

It should also be added here that the British government promoted and encouraged communal politics through a whole range of ways and measures. They created certain institutional structures which had the effect of politically separating Hindus from Muslims. In particular reference should be made of the practice of separate electorates initiated by the British in 1909 through an Act. According to this Act, entirely separate electoral procedures were created for Muslims and Hindus. When electoral democracy was started for Indian society, it was done by creating separate electoral constituencies, voters and candidates on the basis of religion. This meant that separate constituencies were designated as Muslim constituencies. A separate voter list, consisting only of Muslims was prepared. Only Muslim candidates could stand from these Muslim seats, having only Muslim votes. Under this arrangement, it was not possible for a Hindu to vote for a Muslim and vice-versa. It was clear that under such a system, political leaders representing specific religious communities had a good chance of becoming successful. Those political leaders with a support base in both communities, could never succeed because their support base itself was divided.

The system of separate electorates, was the single largest factor responsible for the emergence and the spread of communal politics. The communal politics was initially confined to a small segment of the population, when the voting rights were restricted. Gradually however, as the voting rights began to be extended to more people, so was the possibility of communalism. It is really a curious feature of Indian politics till 1947, that the increasing communalisation of Indian society and politics was integrally connected with the increasing democratisation of Indian society and politics. Given the peculiar nature of electoral politics introduced by the British, democratisation and communalisation went hand-in-hand.

33.3 COMMUNAL PROBLEM AND THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

The Indian national movement was based on the twin ideas of anti-imperialism and national unity. These two ideas were interconnected but not identical. The tradition of anti-imperialism was much older and dated back to the days of British conquest. Ever since the British rule was established, different groups – peasants, tribals, traditional zamindars, chieftains – had rebelled against it at different points and places. The Rebellion of 1857 was actually a culmination of traditional anti-imperialist rebellions. With the gradual emergence of an Indian nation since the late 19th century, the old tradition of anti-imperialism found a new ally in national unity. From now onwards, an organic connection developed between the two. It began to be argued, quite correctly, that an effective anti-imperialist protest could develop only if it was combined with national unity. National unity meant a coming together of all Indians – cutting across differences of religion, culture, language and region – on a common platform and acquiring a common national consciousness.

It should be quite clear that communalism stood as the single most serious obstacle to this project of national unity. Thus, political national unity and political communal unity were separate trajectories, basically opposed to each other. One

could succeed only at the expense of the other. This reality of Indian polity had been clearly understood both by the colonial state and the leaders of the national movement. But they derived very different conclusions from it. The colonial state understood that an effective counterpoise to the growing national movement could be developed by preventing national unity and by promoting inter-religious division in Indian politics. The colonial state systematically pursued its politics of preventing national unity throughout. The leaders of the national movement, on the other hand, decided to handle sensitive religious matters in such a manner as not to create friction and division across religions. For instance, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution, at its fourth session in Allahabad in 1888, not to take up any issue concerning a religious community, if the majority of that community was opposed to it. These were initial efforts to try and discourage any kind of religious divide within the ranks of Congress.

However, certain developments of the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century adversely affected these fragile though sincere efforts of the nationalist leadership, and complicated the issue. Let us briefly look at some of these developments:

- The Arya Samaj was formed in 1875 and became quite active in north India. The organization attempted to consolidate Hindus on a common social platform. A militant branch of the Arya Samaj started a campaign called *Shudhi* (purification), which was based on a re-conversion of those Hindus, who had been earlier converted to other faiths. The activities of the Arya Samaj however were confined to the field of education and reform. Around the same time, a cultural and educational movement developed among the Muslim elite of north India, called the Aligarh movement. Syed Ahmed Khan, the leader of the Aligarh movement, wanted to develop a partnership between the Muslim elite and the British government. So when the Congress was formed in 1885, he made an appeal to Muslims to stay away from it. These two institutions – Arya Samaj and Aligarh movement – effectively prevented unity of Hindu and Muslim elite of north India.

- In 1905, Congress launched Swadeshi movement against the decision of the British government to partition the province of Bengal into two. The proposed partition was such that one part of Bengal was to have a Muslim majority. The British government projected the partition as something that would benefit the Muslims. The British propaganda was very successful and the Muslims stayed away from the Swadeshi movement. Though in its basic character, the movement was essentially anti-imperialist, yet it acquired a Hindu identification. By the end of the movement in 1908, the Hindu-Muslim divide had become deeper.

- Formation of All India Muslim League (AIML) in 1906 and All India Hindu Mahasabha (AIHMS) in 1915, added a new dimension to the communal problem. These two organisations claimed to represent the Muslims and Hindus, respectively. The antagonism between the two religious communities got a new fillip with the formations of these organisations. It also created new challenges for Congress as representing the politics of secular nationalism.

33.4 THE CONGRESS APPROACH TOWARDS THE COMMUNAL PROBLEM

It was thus clear to Congress leadership that the communal problem was a huge obstacle in the anti-imperialist struggle and that it was absolutely necessary to address and solve the communal problem.

The available evidence suggests that the Congress leadership did not approach this question with a well-rounded and comprehensive strategic framework. Rather the leadership treated this question as a contingency and dealt with it on the basis of immediate political situation. To put it differently, the leadership tried to handle the communal problem with a series of tactical options, tried at different points in time. These tactical options were not necessarily connected with each other and sometimes they were also inconsistent with each other. This was completely in contrast with the Congress approach towards the anti-imperialist question. The anti-imperialist struggle, particularly from 1920 onwards, was fought within a well-rounded and comprehensive strategic framework. Nothing like a centralized strategy existed *vis-a-vis* the communal problem.

Basically, at the level of a problem to be solved, communal problem meant three things to Congress leadership:

1) How to bring Muslims into the Congress fold?

2) How to handle Muslim League with its ever increasing demands?

3) How to prevent Hindu Mahasabha from becoming the spokesman of Hindus?

Out of the three the third appeared the simplest and easiest to achieve. Congress had effectively neutralised any possible threat emanating from Hindu Mahasabha. As mentioned earlier, a larger number of Hindus had joined Congress, more so after the Swadeshi movement. Congress had disseminated the ideas of territorial nationalism to them. Given the strong base Congress had acquired among Hindus, it appeared unlikely that Hindu Mahasabha, with its narrow base and elitist politics, would be able to make a dent in the Congress bastion and be able to wean away Hindus from the Congress fold.

Initially the main focus of the Congress was mainly on how to bring Muslims into Congress. On this question the approach of the leadership consisted of four different tactical options tried at different times: a) pacts and negotiations, b) aiming for an exclusive Muslim mobilisation, such as the one tried during the Khilafat movement, c) hoping to rope in Muslims through general nationalist or class appeal and mobilisation, and d) through maintaining active Congress presence inside Muslim League and other organisations of Muslims. Quite often one option was tried after the other one had been exhausted. Different tactical options employed by the leadership did not form parts of a package, but existed quite independent of, and unrelated to, each other.

The Lucknow Pact signed in 1916 between Congress and Muslim League was based on the idea that Muslim League was truly representative of Muslims. Congress granted concessions to Muslim in recognition of this idea. It was hoped by Congress leadership that a pact with Muslim League would enable it to gain access to Muslims. However, the pact was based on the promise of certain concessions. It became redundant once British government granted more

concessions, as part of Government of India Act of 1919, than Congress had promised.

The Khilafat movement, fought under Gandhi's leadership provided yet another opportunity to Congress to bring Muslims within its fold. The Khilafat movement was essentially the product of a global political climate in which the ideas of anti-imperialism and of pan-Islamism tended to go hand in hand. Its manifestation in India was an alliance between the nationalist and the Islamic forces. The Khilafat movement as a tactics for Muslim mobilisation was quite successful during the course of the movement. Large number of Muslims became a part of Congress activities. There was a marked decline in communal activities. Conflict around cow slaughter and music before mosque came down significantly.

However the grand alliance ended with the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement following the violence at Chauri-Chaura, and the annulment of the Khilafat issue in Turkey itself because of the overthrow of the institution of Khalifa there. The end of the alliance turned out to be bitter and there was a significant increase in communal activities. It has been argued by historians that the Khilafat experiment damaged the cause of secular nationalism by legitimizing religion's entry into politics and thus consolidating communalism in the long run. Bipan Chandra writes:

...since the Muslim masses and lower middle classes were brought into the anti-imperialist movement through an agreement with the top leaders and on a religious question, they came into it with their existing consciousness intact. They joined the movement as a matter of religiosity and not for the protection and advancement of their democratic and economic rights. What is even more important, the very terms of this agreement prevented Gandhi and the nationalist leadership from using this opportunity to impart a modern, secular, democratic and anti-imperialist consciousness or understanding of social forces to the Muslim masses who participated in the non-cooperation-cum-Khilafat-Movement. (Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, p. 260.)

The emergence of the left-wing politics since the late 1920s provided a political alternative to the Khilafat movement. Now it was not considered necessary to bring religion into politics in order to bring Muslims into Congress. In fact, such an approach was considered not just undesirable but also outdated and medieval, under left-wing influence. Jawaharlaal Nehru was convinced that Religion was actually the source of all communal troubles and that it had to be kept out of every aspect of public life. It now began to be argued by some Congress leaders that Congress should reach out to Muslims, *not as Muslims*, but as part of larger pools of workers, peasants, middle classes etc., or simply as Indians. It was felt that a separate religious appeal was unnecessary. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, an important Congress leader from UP, issued an interesting statement in 1937, making it clear that the pacts between religious communities and with communal organisations were a thing of the past:

Maulana Shaukat Ali and Sri Jinnah should realise that this is not the India of 1920s. We have moved ahead and if Sri Jinnah and Maulana Shaukat Ali do not keep up with the times, it is not our fault. Earlier cleavages [in the society] are fast disappearing and are being replaced by new ones. From 1920 to 1930 major communities were religious – Hindus, Mussalmans, Parsees, Sikhs etc.... Today

they have been replaced by communities based on class – Taluqdars, Zamindars, Kisans ...workers, factory owners and customers. Those who have worked in the villages in the previous elections know that Muslim Kisans are as interested in, and influenced by, the peasant-related activity of the Congress as the Hindus. This is only natural.... We are [therefore] not going to convene a meeting of the two communities to solve the Hindu-Muslim problem. (Quoted in Salil Misra, *A Narrative of Communal Politics, Uttar Pradesh, 1937-39*, p. 227.)

The formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 provided a further fillip to this tendency which relied upon class categories, rather than religious ones, to bring more and more Muslims into Congress.

Almost simultaneously with this, another stream of thought developed within Congress on how to effectively deal with communal bodies. It consisted of maintaining an active presence in the communal organisations to prevent their further slide down the communal road. As part of this thinking, some Congress leaders joined either Muslim League or Hindu Mahasabha. Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai (till he died in 1928) and B.S. Moonje were members of both Congress and Hindu Mahasabha. Likewise Suleiman Ansari, Hafiz Ibrahim, M.C. Chagla and Khaliquzzaman were simultaneously members of both Congress and Muslims League. Important Congress leaders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sarojini Naidu, Asaf Ali often attended the sessions of Muslim League in the 1920s. Sometimes Congress leaders also made speeches from Muslim League platform.

It seems that this approach of containing communalism from within and through some kind of infiltration was more in vogue in the 1920s and went out of practice in the 1930s. From late 1920s onwards, the conflicts between Congress and Muslim League on the one hand, and Congress and Mahasabha on the other, increased quite a bit and the Congress leaders found it difficult to retain a foothold in both the organisations. However, it was only in 1938 that Congress high command forbade the office bearers of Congress to maintain dual membership with communal organisations such as Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha.

The year 1937 is very crucial as far as Congress approach to communal question is concerned. It was in this year that the first general elections were held under separate electorates. The election results revealed some important facts. Congress had done very badly in exclusively Muslim seats, consisting exclusively of Muslim voters. Out of a total of 485 Muslim seats, Congress contested only 58 and won 26. However, what was even more interesting was that even Muslim League did not do too well in Muslim seats. It got a little over hundred seats, around 20% of the total Muslim seats and around 5% of total Muslim votes. It was clear that although Muslim League had done better than Congress in Muslim seats, it was nowhere near a satisfactory performance for the League. Most of the Muslim seats had gone either to regional parties, or to independent candidates or to local small parties. It was also clear that the Muslim voters were as yet outside any major political ideological influence, either of the nationalist variety or of the communal variety.

It was against this background that Jawaharlal Nehru came out with a new approach. The new approach consisted of ignoring the communal organisations because the election results had clearly brought out their unrepresentative

character. Instead Congress should reach out directly to the masses of Muslims and bring them into its fold. It was hoped that in this way Congress would be able to deal effectively with the communal problem. Nehru, as Congress President, issued a circular to all Provincial Congress Committees to 'make a special effort to enrol Muslim Congress members'. It started the Muslim Mass Contact Programme by Congress in April 1937. This programme alarmed the Muslim League leadership which decided to initiate a similar programme of reaching out to Muslim masses. The Congress campaign went on till 1939 after which it subsided and eventually petered out. In this way, by around 1940, Congress leadership had tried a whole range of options to deal with the communal problem.

33.5 AN APPRAISAL OF THE CONGRESS APPROACH

In general it can be said that the Congress approach met with both success and failure. Or rather, it succeeded in some areas and failed in some others.

Congress approach in handling Hindu communalism and its organisation the Hindu Mahasabha, was extremely successful. A strong Hindu communal organisation was potentially capable of reducing Congress to a position of political insignificance. But that did not happen. A large body of Hindus had joined Congress fairly early on, certainly from the days of Swadeshi movement, well before the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha. They remained with Congress even after the formation of Mahasabha. The Hindu Mahasabha remained an elite organisation, devoid of larger support. It is therefore not surprising that it was ignored by all the other major political forces of the time – British, Congress and Muslim League. Hindu Mahasabha contested the general elections of 1937 and 1946 but failed to get the political support of Hindus. In the crucial elections of 1946, its vote share was around 1% of total Hindu votes. Throughout the period of the national movement, the forces of Hindu communalism remained very weak. It can be argued that Congress, through its activities, had succeeded in disseminating the idea of territorial nationalism to a majority of Hindus. This certainly was a major accomplishment of Congress leadership.

However in certain other respects, the Congress approach has to be considered a failure. If one major objective of the Congress was to bring Muslims into its fold and defeat the Muslim communal organisations politically and ideologically, then obviously the Congress approach did not succeed. All the evidence suggests that almost till the end, Muslim participation in the national movement remained very low. And Muslim communalism kept growing and increasing its demands. The ultimate demand came in 1940 when Muslim League declared that Indian Muslims were not a minority but a nation and therefore entitled to have a separate nation state of their own. This was a demand for a partition of India. This demand became successful in 1947 when the British, before leaving, partitioned India into two separate nation-states, India and Pakistan.

At an elementary level, it may be said that the Congress approach on the communal question lacked the consensus it had on the anti-imperialist issue. Often plans were made by individual leaders, but were implemented by the larger organisation only in a half-hearted manner. This was for instance the case with some of the schemes initiated by Nehru and Gandhi in the 1930s. The Congress leadership

did not fully realise the rapid pace at which communalism, particularly its Muslim variant, was growing. The leadership therefore often suggested mechanisms that may have been appropriate for the earlier phase of communalism, but not applicable under changed circumstances. To take an example, in his correspondence and negotiations with Jinnah during 1937-38, Nehru kept asking Jinnah what his demands were. Once Congress knew what the major Muslim League demands were, they would try to address them. Such an approach was perfectly appropriate for the communal situation prevalent in the 1920s. In the 1920s the politics of communalism essentially represented a set of demands. British government and Congress were the acknowledged major political forces, and communal leaders of different persuasions were putting forward their demands either to British or to Congress. However, by the 1930s, important changes came about in the character of Muslim communalism. Muslim League was now fighting for parity, to be treated at par with Congress and to be recognized as the only authoritative body representative of Indian Muslims. In a decade's time Muslim League had been transformed from a petitioning body into an organisation claiming equal status with the Congress. In such a scenario, Nehru asking Jinnah about his demands obviously made no sense and only infuriated Jinnah. The Nehru-Jinnah negotiations broke down, mainly because of a basic incompatibility in how the two parties understood each other.

As mentioned in the previous section, Nehru, as Congress president declared in 1937 that they would ignore the communal leaders and reach out directly to Muslim masses. Once Muslim masses joined Congress, the communal problem would be solved easily, if not automatically. In itself this was a sound approach and certainly had the potentials of being successful. The trouble was that when Congress started its Muslim mass contact campaign, Muslim League also started its own campaign of mass contact. By 1939-40, it had become quite clear that the Muslim League campaign had been much more successful and a large body of Muslims had joined Muslim League. Muslim League in the 1940s was no longer an elite organisation that could be easily ignored. The new situation obviously required a new approach from Congress. The earlier approach of ignoring Muslim League, as suggested by Nehru, could only work in a context when Muslim League was a tiny insignificant body. But once it became popular and powerful, and was also recognised by the British government, it would be simply counter-productive to ignore it.

The trouble however was that as Muslim League became more popular, it also became more stridently communal. It entered a phase of extreme communalism. Its major demand now was a separate homeland for Indian Muslims. This was a difficult demand to meet for a nationalist body like Congress. So at a time when it was necessary for Congress to come to terms with Muslim League (because it had become popular), it also became very difficult for Congress (because the League had begun demanding Pakistan). Thus, it was difficult for the Congress to evolve a satisfactory mechanism to deal with Muslim League. Muslim League's simultaneous popularisation and shift to extreme communalism had serious implications for Congress approach. Had Muslim League become popular without shifting to extreme communalism, it would have been possible – and relatively easy – to negotiate and deal with it. On the other hand, had Muslim League had shifted to extreme communalism without becoming popular it would have been possible for Congress to ignore it. But that was not to be.

Apart from the basic inability to effectively come to terms with communalism, its politics, organisations and the leadership, a large number of other weaknesses within Congress have also been pointed out by various scholars. The essentially middle class character of the Congress leadership, inability or refusal to offer more concessions to Muslim League and not doing enough to win its political support, a right wing hegemony within Congress leadership thwarting the efforts of the organisation to reach out to Muslims, and the presence of many Hindu revivalist elements within Congress leadership making it difficult for Muslims to join Congress, have been some of the explanations offered for the failure of Congress to incorporate Muslims into the national movement in large numbers. It would be safe to conclude that the inability, or failure, of the leadership of the national movement to evolve and implement a comprehensive strategy to counter communalism, must constitute an important part of the explanation for the emergence of communalism in India.

33.6 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU AND COMMUNALISM

While studying the Congress approach towards the communal question, it is very necessary to deal specifically with the ideas and activities of Jawaharlal Nehru vis-à-vis the communal question. Nehru, more than any other Congress leader, paid attention to this question, wrote about it and often formulated the Congress approach to this question. In his long political career, many changes came about in his understanding of communalism as a political phenomenon.

Nehru was a pioneer on an understanding of communalism. Many of the social science ideas on communalism – consensual as well as contentious – actually go back to Nehru. It would be difficult to attempt a historical analysis of communalism in India without referring to Nehru's ideas. His ideas were constantly growing and evolving, as far as communalism is concerned. However, the 1930s, particularly the period 1932-37 is the most crucial period for his intellectual engagement with the issue. It was during this period that major breakthroughs occurred in his thinking and remained with him in the subsequent period. Broadly speaking, following ideas may be treated as the major building blocks in Nehru's understanding of communalism. These ideas also shaped the approaches that were adopted during this period by Congress vis-a-vis the communal problem:

- Nehru increasingly began to see that communalism was not simply a question of religion, or of religious differences, or only a matter of violence. He set out to explore the social and economic roots of the communal question in India. He began to look upon it as essentially a middle class problem, rooted in the insecurities, anxieties and the uneven development of the middle classes in India. In other words, Nehru began to apply a Marxian approach to an understanding of the communal problem. Prior to Nehru, the communal question was often seen primarily in terms of conflict between religious communities and politics based on those conflicts.

- An extension of this understanding was that he looked upon the problem as a 'myth' or as something false. By that he did not mean that it was empirically false or that it did not exist, but that it did not correctly represent the social reality. It claimed to protect religion but in reality it only served the narrow interests of the middle and the upper classes. Thus he began to see

communalism as a tool in the hands of the vested interests. He argued that communalism was a smoke screen to disguise the narrow class interests of the elites.

- Nehru was probably the first the talk separately of minority and majority communalisms, or rather Muslim and Hindu communalism. In an essay, he provided the novel thesis that whereas the communalism of the majority can easily disguise as some kind of nationalism, the minority communalism has to emphasis its separateness. This may impart some respectability to the communalism of the majority, but in reality both are equally anti-people and dangerous.

- Nehru made a distinction between communalism borne out of fear and insecurity, and communalism as motivated by narrow selfish interests. He called former "Honest Communalism" and latter "False Communalism". He made a historic statement in one of his essays: "Honest Communalism is fear; false communalism is political reaction."

- He also saw communalism as a weapon in the hands of those opposed to progress and change. Such elements were also supported by the British. It was not just a part of their policy of discrediting anti-imperialist Indian nationalism. It also fitted in with their tendency of aligning with the most conservative sections of the Indian population. He equated communalism with obscurantism and medievalism and something that was essentially opposed to progress and a modern outlook.

All these points were important inputs into a general understanding of communalism that developed in India from 1940s onwards. However, with the advantage of hindsight, we should also point out two major limitations in the way Nehru looked at communalism:

1) When communalism, particularly Muslim communalism, began to break out of the middle class fold and acquire mass support, particularly after 1937, Nehru welcomed this development. He appeared convinced at this stage that communalism could not remain reactionary and become a mass force at the same time. He hoped that the popular pressure would force the Muslim League to moderate and dilute its communalism. That a popular communalism was somehow a contradiction in terms; it could either be popular or communal but not both. Nehru was optimistic that the entry of masses would cleanse the Muslim League of its negative reactionary character. Nehru did not foresee that this development could transform communalism itself into a powerful mass force. Once that happened, it would be virtually impossible to effectively oppose it. Thus, once this happened, the nationalist forces were quite helpless in the face of communalism backed up by mass support.

2) Nehru's search for economic roots of communalism also culminated in the creation of a somewhat economistic and deterministic position on communalism. It was also the result of a mechanical application of Marxism to the important social and political problems of the times. He understood communalism to a product of a particular kind of political economy promoted by British imperialism. From here he went on to infer that the removal of

imperialism and economic development would be able to rid Indian society of communalism. He perhaps did not see the need for a powerful ideological campaign against communalism, particularly after independence. He believed that the communal consciousness among the people was rooted in the existing material conditions. Therefore a transformation of the material conditions would be successful in altering that consciousness. He did not foresee that an ideology, after establishing firm roots in the minds and hearts of the people, can acquire an independent life of its own.

To sum up this section, Nehru should be credited with having made an important contribution to the rich historiography that developed on communalism. Many of the ideas were initiated by Nehru and subsequently developed by other social scientists. The socio-economic background to communalism, distinctions between minority and majority communalism, class character of communalism, communal consciousness being 'false', communalism as the Indian brand of Fascism are some of the ideas that began with Nehru and were developed further by historians.

33.7 SUMMARY

This Unit has argued the following points:

- The 19th century in Indian history experienced the unfolding of a new type of state system and a new type of economy. Under this stimulus, the traditional Indian social structure began to undergo a transformation. This transformation altered India's community profile in extremely profound ways. By the end of the 19th century, Indian society witnessed the emergence of pan-Indian, internally standardized, externally differentiated, religious communities of Hindus and Muslims. This transformed community structure was extremely conducive for communalism. Under the stimulus of communalism, the pan-Indian religious communities of Hindus and Muslims were also transformed as political constituencies.

- The nationalist struggle was based on the twin ideas of anti-imperialism and national unity. The ideal of national unity could be seriously damaged by the development of communal politics. Certain developments during the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century created a political divide between Hindus and Muslims. It was therefore imperative for the nationalist leadership to try and effectively deal with communal politics, if the idea of Indian nationalism was to survive politically.

- During the initial decades of the nationalist struggle, the Congress leadership did not approach this question with a coordinated and centralized strategic framework. Instead, the leadership tried a whole range of different tactical options at different points. On the whole, although the Congress was successful in containing the Hindu Mahasabha, it failed to bring in a large number of Muslims within its folds. The year 1937 brought a new dimension to communal politics. The results of the first general elections, held under separate electorates, demonstrated that Indian Muslim voters had not as yet been successfully mobilised either by the nationalist forces or by the communal ones. This was seen as an opportunity by Nehru to start a Muslim mass contact campaign seeking to mobilise Muslims on a Congress platform. But the Congress campaign petered out after 1939.

- During the post-1937 period, Muslim League gradually acquired a mass base. It was also transformed in the direction of extreme communalism. In 1940, it put forward the demand for Pakistan, as a separate nation-state of Indian Muslims. The simultaneous popularisation and communalisation of Muslim League made it extremely difficult for the Congress leadership to effectively deal with the communal problem.

The further development eventually culminated in 1947 in the partition of the sub-continent. The year 1947 was a year both of the great triumph and a huge tragedy for Indian nationalism. Although India became independent from imperialist control, the *raison detre* of Indian nationalism, it was accompanied by the partition. The inability to maintain the unity of the country on the eve of independence must rank as one of the major failures of the ideology of Indian nationalism.

33.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the nature of communalism before 1920.

2) What were the changes in the communal politics in the wake of the Government of India Act of 1919 and the Khilafat Movement?

3) Explain the factors responsible for the failure of the Congress to contain the Muslim League and its brand of communal politics.

4) Critically analyse Nehru's views on communalism.

ignou THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

UNIT 34 MAKING OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION*

Structure

34.1 Introduction

34.2 Evolution of the Indian Constitution 1858-1935

34.3 Formation of the Constituent Assembly

- 34.3.1 The Cripps Mission
- 34.3.2 The Cabinet Mission
- 34.3.3 Election to the Constituent Assembly

34.4 Nature of Constituent Assembly's Representation

34.5 Role of the Constituent Assembly 1946-1949

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34.7 Salient Features of the Constitution

- 34.7.1 The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy
- 34.7.2 Universal Adult Suffrage and Abolition of the Separate Electorate

34.8 Summary

34.9 Exercises

34.1 INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of India was adopted on 26th November, 1949, which means it was finalised by the Constituent Assembly on that day. But it became operative two months after its adoption, i.e., on 26th January, 1950, which is also known as the date of its "commencement". However, some provision of it (those relating to citisenship, elections, provisional Parliament, temporary and transitional provisions) had become operative on 26th November, 1949 itself. The reasons for its commencement after two months of its adoption was to signify the January 26th as the original date as date of achievement of Independence. It is important to note that the Constitution on India is product of long drawn process and deliberations. This Unit deals with some issues relating to the making of the Indian Constitution. After going through this Unit, you will be able to learn about the:

- stages of constitution making prior to the formation of Constituent Assembly;
- nature of representation of the Constituent Assembly;
- philosophy of the Indian Constitution; and
- debate within the Constituent Assembly on some of the salient features of the Indian Constitution.

34.2 EVOLUTION OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION 1858-1935

The Constitution of India embodies the provisions providing basic democratic rights of human beings including the persons who are not the citizens of the country. It also embodies provisions for the availability of the institutions for

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legislation, execution and jurisdiction for the fulfillment of these rights. It presents vision for the social transformation and deepening of democracy. The process of evolution of democratic institutions and rights had started much before the Constituent Assembly really made the Constitution of India. It, however, must be underlined that the features of democratic institutions and values which were introduced during the colonial period were meant to serve the colonial interests in contrast the purpose of the provisions of the Constitution made by the Constituent Assembly of India.

Although the Indian Constitution was result of the deliberations (from Dec 9, 1947 to November 26, 1949) of the Constituent Assembly of the country, some of its features had evolved over a long time through various Acts i.e., from 1958 to 1935. The measures by the colonial authorities to introduce the institutions of governance were indeed responses to the protests against the British. If the transfer of rule from the East India Company was a reaction to revolt of 1857, subsequent Acts were the British response to the national movement against them. The main purpose of doing so was to continue colonial rule and to adapt it to the changing challenges. With the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British Crown, the British Parliament got involved in managing affairs of India. For this purpose it introduced different rules which laid the foundation of our constitution or provided a background to it. During this period the British Parliament introduced Acts, which defined nature of organs of government –judiciary and executive; introduced the notion of representative democracy, though of a limited nature, decentralisation, minority rights/communal representation and provincial autonomy. It is important to note that these form significant features of the Constitution which commenced in Independent India. As mentioned earlier, the nature of these provisions, however, was different from those the Constitution which people of India adopted. These provisions were introduced through different Acts in the pre-Independence period – Government of India Acts – of 1857, 1919 and 1935; The Council of India Acts of 1861, 1892; The Morely-Minto Reforms 1909. These Acts were consolidated into a single Act, i.e., Government of India Act of 1935. This Act aimed at putting separate provisions about the legislative, executive and judicial branches which till now scattered in different Acts into one single Act. As you know the Congress opposed the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919 and launched non-cooperation movement. And in response the British government appointed the Simon Commission to review the functioning of the Act of 1919. Though Simon Commission was boycotted by the Congress, a large section of people did give representations to the Simon Commission. The Simon Commission submitted its report in 1930. The British government brought up the Simon Commission Report for discussion in the Round Table Conference in London. However, the British Prime Minister issued a "Communal Award" on August 4, 1932, which underlined that before discussion of the Simon Commission Report there Hindus and Muslims have to agree to some agreement for solution. It noted that the division between Hindus and Muslims had widened after the introduction of the Government of India Act, 1919. Following the discussion in the Round Table Conference, the British Government passed Government of India Act, 1935, which provided for separate representations to Muslims, Sikhs, the Europeans, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians. In the light of the Government of India Act, 1935, the election to the provincial assembly was held in 1937, and the Congress formed government in many provinces. The Congress governments, however, could not complete their terms and had to resign before completing their terms.

These developments took place in the backdrop of clamouring for formation of constitution for Indians by themselves. In 1928 the first attempt to prepare a Constitution of India was made in the Nehru Report in the conference of the established All India parties (except the Justice Party in Madras and Unionist Party in Punjab). The Nehru Report demanded universal suffrage for adults and responsible government both in the centre and the provinces. It, however, supported the Dominion Status and not complete independence, which disappointed the younger generation of the Congress. Indeed, in 1934 the Congress officially demanded a constitution of Indian people, without the interference of outsiders. The Indian National Congress realised this with the failure of the Statutory Commission and Round Table Conference. Although the demand for the swaraj (self-rule) by the National leaders was made during the non-cooperation movement in 1922, it was only in 1938 that Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress demanded that a Constituent Assembly be formed to draft a Constitution to govern the affairs of Independent India. The Congress Working Committee reiterated the demand in 1939.

34.3 FORMATION OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

34.3.1 The Cripps Mission

Initially the colonial authorities resisted the demand for creation of a Constitution. But with the change in the circumstances – the outbreak of the World War II and formation of the new Coalition (labour-led) government in Britain – forced the British government to acknowledge the urgency to solve the problem related to Constitution of Indians. In 1942 the British government sent its cabinet member – Sir Stafford Cripps – with the draft declaration on proposals (regarding a constitution for Indians) to be implemented at the end of the World War II provided both the Muslim League and the INC had agreed to accept them. The draft proposals of the Cripps Mission recommended the following: providing the Dominion Status, i.e., equal partnership of the British Commonwealth of Nations; all Provinces and Indian States should constitute one India Union by the British Constitution; the Constitution of India should be framed by an elected Constituent Assembly of the Indian people but if any province (or Indian State) which was not prepared to accept the Constitution was to be free to retain its constitutional position which had existed at that time, such provinces were to be free to enter into separate constitutional arrangements.

Both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League did not accept the proposals of the Cripps Mission. The Muslim League demanded that India should be divided on the communal lines and some provinces should form and independent state of Pakistan, and there should be two Constituent Assemblies, one for Pakistan and another for India.

34.3.2 The Cabinet Mission

The British Indian government made several attempts to bridge the differences between the Congress and the Muslim League. But it was unsuccessful. The British government sent another delegation of the Cabinet members, known as the Cabinet Delegation, which also came to be known as the Cabinet Mission

Plan. It consisted of three cabinet members – Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A.V. Alexander. The Cabinet Delegation also failed to bring the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League to an agreement. It, however, made its own proposal which was announced simultaneously on 16th May, 1946 in England as well as in India. The Cabinet delegation made the following recommendations: there should a Union of India consisting of British India and the States, which will have jurisdiction over subjects of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Communication; all residuary powers would belong to the Provinces and the States; the Union should have Executive and Legislature consisting of the representatives from the Provinces and the States but for decision relating to a major communal issue in the legislature a majority of representatives of two major communities present, and voting along with the majority of all members present and voting would be required, and; the provinces would be free to form Groups with executives and legislatures, and each group would be free to determine the Provincial Subjects which would be taken up by the Group organisation.

34.3.3 Election to the Constituent Assembly

Meanwhile, According to the proposals of the Cabinet Mission, the election to the Constituent Assembly was held in which members of both the Congress and the Muslim League were returned. The members of the Constituent Assembly were elected by the Provincial Legislative Assemblies. However, differences between the Congress and the Muslim League arose on interpretation of "Group Clauses" of the Cabinet Mission. The British government intervened at this stage and explained to the leaders in London that the contention of the Muslim League was correct. And on December 6, 1946, the British Government published a statement, which for the first time acknowledged the possibility of two Constituent Assemblies and two States. As a result when the Constituent Assembly first met on December 9, 1946, it was boycotted by the Muslim League, and it functioned without the participation of the Muslim League.

34.4 NATURE OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY'S REPRESENTATION

It is often argued that the Constituent Assembly of India did not represent the masses of India because its representatives were not elected through the universal adult franchise. Rather they were indirectly elected by the restricted adult franchise confined to the elite sections of society – the educated and tax payers. According to Austin, reasons for the restricted franchise and indirect election of the Constituent Assembly members were spelled by the Cabinet Mission Plan – to avoid the cumbersome and slow progress in the process of Constitution making. The Cabinet Mission provided for the indirect election to the Constituent Assembly by the elected members of the provincial legislature. Congress agreed to this proposal of the Cabinet Mission forsaking the claim of adult franchise to hold election to the Constituent Assembly. Despite having been elected through the restricted adult franchise, the Constituent Assembly represented different shades of opinions and religious communities of India. Austin observes that though there was a majority of the Congress in the Constituent Assembly, it had an "unwritten and unquestioned belief" that Congress should represent social and ideological diversity. There was also its "deliberate policy" that the

representatives of various minority communities and viewpoints should be represented in the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly consisted of members with different ideological orientations, and three religious communities – Sikhs, Muslims and General (Hindus and all other communities like the Anglo-Indians, Parsis, etc.). In words of K. Santaram "There was hardly any shade of opinion not represented in the Assembly" (see Austin, 2012, p.13, fn.48). Majority of the Constituent Assembly members belonged to the Congress. It also included non-Congress members like A.K. Ayyer and N.G. Ayyanger who were brought by the Congress as "experts"; Dr. Ambedkar and John Matthai, who were also the cabinet ministers; S.P. Mukherjee represented the Hindu Mahasabha. The Constituent Assembly included representatives from the Princely States as well. It needs to be underscored that Dr. Ambedkar was initially elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal as member of the Scheduled Caste Federation. But he lost this seat due to the partition of Bengal and was re-elected by the Bombay Congress (as a non-Congress candidate) at the request of the Congress High Command. The Constituent Assembly sought to address concerns of every person irrespective of their social and cultural orientations. Before incorporating a provision in the constitution, it held elaborate deliberations. Thus the members of the Constituent Assembly were able to overcome the limitations of having been elected by the restricted franchise. As we will discuss in this Unit the Constituent Assembly sought to accommodate universal values of democracy. The Constituent Assembly adopted several provisions from different constitutions of world and adapted to the needs of India. In fact, Austin argues that while incorporating different provisions in the Constitution including those which were borrowed from other countries the Constituent Assembly adopted "two wholly Indian concepts" of resolving differences among its members i.e., consensus and accommodation. Even as the concept of accommodation was used to the principles which were included in the Constitution, that of consensus was adopted in the decision making process.

Most of the members of the Constituent Assembly participated in its proceedings. But these were twenty individuals who played the most influential role in the Assembly. Some of them were Prasad, Asad, Patel, Nehru, Pant, Sitaramayya, Ayyar, Ayyangar, Ambedkar and Satyanarayan Sinha. Though the Constituent Assembly was the sole forum where deliberations took place, yet the deliberations took place in coordination of three bodies – the Constituent Assembly, the Congress Party, and the interim government. Some members of the Constituent Assembly were also members of other bodies at the same time. Austin said that "an oligarchy" of four – Nehru, Patel, Prasad and Asad had enjoyed unquestioned honour and prestige in the assembly. They dominated the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly. Some of these were simultaneously in the government, Congress Party and the Constituent Assembly. Prasad was President of Congress before becoming the President of the Constituent Assembly. Nehru and Patel were Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister at the same time. They were part of the inner circles of the committees of the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution Drafting Committee meticulously incorporated in the draft constitution decisions of the Constituent Assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, chairman of the Drafting Committee, played the leading role in drafting of the Constitution. Acknowledging the pivotal role of Ambedkar, T.T. Krishnamachari, a member of the Drafting Committee, said in one of his speeches:

"The House is perhaps aware that out of the seven members nominated by you, one had resigned from the house and was replaced. One had died and was not replaced. One was away in America and his place was not filled up, and another person was engaged in State Affairs, and there was a void to that extent. One or two people were far away from Delhi and perhaps reasons of health did not permit them to attend. So it happened ultimately that the burden of drafting this constitution fell upon Dr. Ambedkar and I have no doubt that we are grateful to him for having achieved this task in a manner which is undoubtedly commendable."

34.5 ROLE OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY 1946-1949

The inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly was held on the 9th December 1946. It was supposed to be attended by all 296 members but only 207 members could attend it because the Muslim League members were absent from it as they had boycotted the Constituent Assembly. In this meeting, J.B. Kripalani requested Dr. Sachchidanand to take the chair as temporary chairman of the House. The members passed a resolution on the 10th December 1946 for election of a permanent member, and on the 11th December 1946, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was elected as the permanent Chairman of the Constituent Assembly. On 13th December 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru moved resolution regarding Aims and Objectives.

The Constituent Assembly divided its work among different committees for its smooth functioning. Some of the important committees were: (a) Union Power Committee. It was chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru and had nine members; (b) Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities. It had 54 members and Sardar Ballabhbhai Patel was its chairman; (c) Steering Committee and its 3 members which included Dr. K.M. Munshi (chairman), Gopalaswami Iyangar and Bhagwan Das; (d) Provincial Constitution Committee. It had 25 members with Sardar Patel as its chairman; (e) Committee on Union Constitution. It had 15 members with Jawahalal Nehru as its chairman.

After discussing the reports of these committees, the Assembly appointed a Drafting Committee on 29th August 1947 under the chairmanship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The draft was prepared by Sir B.N. Rau, Advisor to the Constituent Assembly. A 7-member Committee was constituted to examine the draft. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who Law Minister as well as chairman of the Drafting, Committee piloted the draft in the Assembly. Dr. Ambedkar presented "Draft Constitution of India" which was an alternative to the proposals given in the reports of the committees; besides it also contained additional resolutions. The "Draft Constitution" was published in February, 1948. It was discussed by the Constituent Assembly clause by clause (this was known as the second reading) in its several sessions and was completed by October 17, 1949. The Constituent Assembly again met on 14th November to discuss the draft further or to give it a third reading. It was finalised on 26th November, 1949 after receiving the signature of the President of the Constituent Assembly. But it was January 26, 1950 which became the date of commencement of the Constitution.

34.6 PHILOSOPHY OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

As is evident from the Preamble of the Constitution given below in sub-section 34.6.1, the philosophy of Indian Constitution is based on the principles of liberal democracy and secularism, with some elements of social democracy. It seeks to protect the rights – justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, of individuals and cultural and religious rights of social and religious communities. It was after a thorough discussion in the Constituent Assembly of the Objective Resolution that the Preamble of the Constitution was adopted. Indeed the deliberations within the Constituent Assembly virtually began with the deliberations of the Objective Resolution. We will discuss below the Objective Resolution and the Preamble.

Objective Resolution and the Preamble of the Constitution

As mentioned earlier, on the 13th December 1946, the fourth day of the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, Jawaharlal Nehru moved the resolution regarding the Aims and Objectives of the Constituent Assembly. This resolution came to be known as the OBJECTIVE RESOLUTION. The Resolution laid down eight points or paragraphs of the Resolution as they were alluded to, as aims and objective. These aims and objectives included:

1) To proclaim India as an Independent Sovereign Republic and to draw up for its future governance a constitution;

2) India would be a Union of the territories consisting of the British India, those covered by the Indian States, and territories which were willing to be constituted into the Independent Sovereign India;

3) The territories in the Union would possess and retain status of autonomous Units, shall have residuary powers, and exercise all powers of government and administration, except those powers and functions as were assigned to or vested in the Union;

4) All powers and Authority of the Sovereign Independent India and its constituent parts and organs were derived from the people;

5) It will guarantee and secure to all people of India Justice**,** Social, Economic and Political Equality of status, of opportunity and before law; Freedom of thought, expression belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and public morality;

6) It will provide adequate safeguards for minorities, backward and tribal areas, and depressed and other backward classes;

7) It shall maintain integrity of the territory of the Republic and its sovereign rights on land, sea and air according to justice and the law of the civilised nations; and

8) To ensure the rightful and honoured place of this ancient land in the world and make its full and willing contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of the mankind.

The debate on the Objective Resolution had specific significance for Dr. Ambedkar. On the resolution he made a "historic speech". When the House met on the 16th December 1946 to discuss the Objective Resolution Dr. M.R. Jayakar

moving an amendment to the Objective Resolution demanded the postponement of the discussion on the resolution, as he wanted the Muslim League and the Indian States to join the debate resulting in creation of "a tense atmosphere in the House". In such a situation Dr. Rajendra Prasad was "unexpectedly" invited on the 17th December 1946 to make his speech. As a result of the impact of his speech the discussion on the resolution was postponed till next session

Preamble

We the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic** and to secure to all its citizens:

Justice, Social, Economic and Political;

Liberty of thought, expression belief, faith and worship;

Equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all

Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation; **In Our Constituent Assembly** this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **Hereby Adopt, Enact and Give to Ourselves this Constitution.**

34.7 SALIENT FEATURES OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Indian Constitution has some salient features. These features give Indian Constitution a distinct identity. It is based on the features of different constitutions of the world. In the words of Dr. Ambedkar, it was prepared "after ransacking all the known Constitutions of the world". The chapter on Fundamental Rights is based on the American Constitution; the Parliamentary System has been adapted from the British Constitution; the Directive Principles of State Policy have been adopted from the constitution of Ireland; the Emergency provisions are based on the Constitution of German Reich and Government of India Act, 1935. But as mentioned earlier, the features which have been borrowed from other Constitutions have been modified in the light of the needs of our country. It is the longest written constitution. At the time of its formation, there were 395 Articles and 8 Schedules. It ensures both Justiciable and Non-Justiciable Rights: Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of the State Policy. We will discuss two of these important features – the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy, abandonment of the separate electorate and universal adult franchise.

34.7.1 The Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy

The Fundamental Rights restrict state from encroaching upon the rights of individuals and Directive Policies of the State Policy make it obligatory for the state to introduce measures for carrying out social revolution. They are enshrined in the III and IV Parts respectively of the Constitution. The Fundamental Rights are divided into seven parts in the Indian Constitutions – the Right of Equality, the Right of Freedom, the Right against Exploitation, the Right to Freedom of Religion, Cultural and Educational Rights, the Right to Property, and the Right to Constitutional Remedies. Before their inclusion in the Constitution of India,

the need for providing Fundamental Rights and the state measures for social transformation were emphasised by the Indian National Congress in several resolutions: Annie Basant's draft of the Commonwealth of India Bill, Nehru Report, Karachi resolution, *Sapru Report* of 1945. The *Sapru Report* was of special significance because apart from the Fundamental Rights and Directive Policy of the State Policy, it suggested the provisions for the protection of minority rights. It was also first to make a distinction between the Fundamental Rights as the justiciable and the Directive Policy of the State Policy as the non-justiciable rights.

In the sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly on Fundamental Rights there were no differences in principles on the rights, though there were some on techniques. It suggested that the Fundamental Rights should be made justiciable. The sub-Committee, however, suggested that despite the negative restriction on it in relation to the Fundamental Rights, state could intervene with regard to the social revolution. Amrit Kaur who was supported by Ayyar opposed inclusion to allow free "practice" of religion in the Fundamental Rights because it could include "anti-social" practices such as Devdasi, sati and Purdah. As an impact of this opposition, a provision was made in the Constitution that right to freely practice religion should not prevent the state from making the laws for social welfare and reform. With regard to suggestion of the sub-Committee about the "equality before law", Ayyar opined that it could be discriminatory against the marginalised groups of the society like factory workers, children and women. He suggested that the "equality before law" should be replaced by the clause stating that "no person should be denied equal protection of law". This suggestion was included in the Constitution. The Sub-committee also discussed matters relating to conflict between individual liberty and state responsibility, and protection of minority rights. As a result of this debate the provisions abolishing forced labour and human trafficking, freedom to practice religion, special provisions for the protection of script, culture and right of the minorities to maintain their educational institutions. These found place in the Constitution.

34.7.2 Universal Adult Suffrage and Abolition of the Separate Electorate

After debating its draft list of Fundamental rights the Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights did not recommend inclusion of all of them in the section III of the Constitution as the Fundamental Rights. Instead it suggested that these should be incorporated in other places in the Constitution. One such example is that of the Universal suffrage and periodic elections. The sub-Committee agreed unanimously in favour of the Universal suffrage but suggested that it should not be part of the Fundamental Rights. Accordingly, it was placed in the Article 326 of the Part XV on election. The word "universal", however, is missing from the Article 326. But the fact that every adult citizen of the country is entitled to vote makes it practically a universal adult franchise. As mentioned earlier, before Indians got the right to universal adult franchise, the prominent leaders of the Indian National movement strove for the abolition of the separate electorate in favour of the joint electorate. As we know the British sought to continue separate electorate in India since the Morley-Minto reforms 1909 till the Communal Award of 1932 in the Constitution. The Communal Award sought to accord separate electorate for Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians. It also provided for seats for the Depressed Classes which were to be filled by

election from special constituencies. In such constituencies only depressed classes could vote. In addition the depressed classes were also entitled to vote in general constituencies. Gandhi protested against the recommendation of the notion of separate electorate for the depressed classes. He sat on fast unto death in September 1932. Gandhi's fast evoked opposition from Ambedkar. However, both Gandhi and Ambedkar reached compromise in Poona Pact. According to the Poona Pact, seats were reserved for the depressed classes in the general constituencies. This resulted in the abolition of the separate electorate. The abolition of separate electorate got reflected in the reservation of seats in the legislative bodies Constitution.

34.8 SUMMARY

The making of Indian Constitution largely consisted of two phases – 1857 to 1935 and 1946 to 1949. With the transfer of power from the Company to the British Crown, the British government introduced different elements of governance through different Acts. These also included the elements of representation of Indians in the institutions of governance. The motive of the British to introduce them was to serve their colonial interests rather than to provide democratic rights to them. The provision for communal representation introduced through the Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909 and through the Communal Award in 1932 was opposed by the leaders of the Indian National Movement, particularly in case of the Depressed Classes. Gandhi's fast which resulted in the Poona Pact resulted in the abolition of the separate electorate but in giving the reservation to the depressed classes in the provincial legislature. After the Congress emphasised the need for making of a Constitution of India by their own Constituency, the British reluctantly realised the urgency for establishment of the Constituent Assembly of India for Indians in the changed political situation following the Second World War and change of government in Britain. The Constituent Assembly which was set up following the recommendations of the Cabinet Mission Plan was elected through the restricted adult franchise by the provincial assemblies. Despite having been elected by the privileged sections of the society, the Constituent Assembly represented different shades of opinions and ideologies. It also represented different social groups of India. Before reaching any decision the Constituent Assembly discussed all issues thoroughly. The decision and suggestions by different sub-Committees of the Constituent Assembly were finally incorporated in the Constitution of India. The Constitution of India is the document which provided vision for social change. The Constitution is an embodiment of principles of liberal democracy and secularism, with some elements of social democracy. It ensures protection of the rights – justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, of individuals and cultural and religious rights of social and religious communities.

34.9 EXERCISES

1) What were the provisions of the Nehru Report? What were its shortcomings?

2) Discuss the role of the Constituent Assembly in making of the Indian Constitution.

3) Describe the important provisions of the Indian Constitution.

UNIT 35 LEGACIES OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT*

Structure

35.1 Introduction

35.2 Uniqueness of the Indian National Movement

35.3 Legacies

- 35.3.1 Making of the Indian Nation
- 35.3.2 Mass Participation in Politics
- 35.3.3 Promotion of Civil Liberties
- 35.3.4 Economic Development based on Modern Science and Technology
- 35.3.5 Secularism
- 35.3.6 Independent Foreign Policy

35.4 Weaknesses and Limitations

35.5 Summary

35.6 Exercises

35.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last Unit of the course. The purpose of this Unit is to provide an overview of the entire course. In particular it discusses the legacies of the national movement, and picks up those strands of the movement that have some relevance for independent India. In a way it tries to provide an answer to the question: what is living and what is dead about the Indian national movement? Or, rather, what ended in 1947 and what has continued since then? It is quite clear that agitations against British imperialism ended in 1947 with the attainment of freedom. But some traits and practices developed during the course of the movement continued to cast their shadow on the course of the development of Indian society after 1947. The Unit on legacies is essentially an attempt to take stock of such traits and practices.

35.2 UNIQUENESS OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Seen in a global context, the place of the Indian national movement in Indian history is broadly comparable to the place of French Revolution in the history of Europe and the Russian Revolution in Russian history. The Indian National Movement represented the largest possible consensus, particularly after 1920, when it came under Gandhi's leadership. The consensus enabled the legacy of the movement to endure and survive. The consensus generated during the national movement was not an inheritance; it did not already exist prior to the movement as a kind of an *a priori* reality. The consensus was created by the movement during its own life. This consensus rested on two pillars:

- Anti-imperialism
- A conception of national unity

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All those individuals and organisations that believed in, and practised, these two ideas could be considered to be a part of the national consensus, generated by the national movement. This creation of a minimum baseline criterion enabled the movement to create an 'umbrella consensus'. This in effect implied that all categories of Indians except **loyalists** (those who remained loyal to the British and were a part of the support system built by British imperialism) and communalists (who did not share the idea of national unity and worked instead for the creation of standardised and homogenised religious-political communities) were a part of this consensus. This consensus was truly like a spectrum and a whole range of political strands were accommodated within it. Political trends as far apart from each other as the Revolutionaries, Communists, Socialists, Left-wingers within Congress, Right-wingers within Congress, Centralists, Constitutionalists, and Liberals, among others, could all retain their differences and yet be a part of the umbrella consensus. They were not required to abandon their basic political orientation in order to join the national movement. This consensus enabled the movement to retain considerable internal diversity yet maintain an over-all unity.

This plurality was an important uniqueness of the national movement. Apart from providing diversity to the nationalist struggle, it also enabled the movement to make smooth transition from a struggle to State power in 1947.

35.3 LEGACIES

The Indian National Movement left a rich legacy for independent India. But legacies do not naturally last forever. They do not have a self-sustaining capacity. They have got to be consciously nurtured and sustained with effort. For independent India this legacy was something like 'ancestral wealth'; it could either be nurtured or thrown away.

So what is the legacy of the national movement which needs to be nurtured and remembered? There are in fact six crucial components of this legacy.

35.3.1 Making of the Indian Nation

The Indian nationalism that evolved since the second half of the 19th century was a variant of the generic global phenomenon called nationalism. But it also evolved some distinctive features of its own. In a nutshell, it was territorial (as against ethnic), civic (as against religious), plural (as against mono-cultural) and remarkably non-coercive. It tried to evolve national unity without seeking to impose it from the top. Its main tendency was homogenizing (as all nationalisms inevitably are) but without being unduly coercive. As mentioned above, anti-imperialism and national unity were the two major pillars that sustained the edifice of Indian nationalism.

This Indian nation was made essentially by the national movement and constitutes its major legacy. It is important to remember that a nation of Indian people did not already exist; it had to be created. The task of the national movement was not just to represent the Indian nation but also to create it. This was important because some of the British scholars, ethnographers and other commentators had virtually ruled out the possibility of nationhood for India. They did not look upon the Indian people as capable of evolving a common nationality. The 19th century

Indian nationalist response to this was to assert that the Indian people were a "nation-in-making". This concept (articulated for the first time by the leading moderate leader Surendranath Bannerjea) consisted of a recognition in the 19th century that the people of India, divided into regions, languages, castes and religions, were not a nation but they were on their way to acquiring a common nationhood. They were not *inherently* incapable of acquiring nationhood and their internal diversities, of caste, language, religion and region, were not a major hindrance in their journey towards nationhood.

When India became free in 1947, anti-imperialism - one of the two pillars of Indian nationalism – ceased to have any operative significance and was no longer a major constitutive element of Indian nationalism. What would now be the essential character of Indian nationalism? This was an important question and Nehru, independent India's first prime minister, gave considerable thought to it. According to him, the Indian nation was to be based on economic development and an "emotional integration" of the people. Nehru understood that modern economic development, in a large and plural country like India, was bound to lead to initial disparities and displacements. It was not possible for Indian society to make its transition to industrial affluence without going through the pain and trauma of displacements. Such a situation could easily create social turmoil and tear apart the entire fabric of society. It was hoped that Indian nationalism would be able to neutralize these potential ill-effects inherent in the transition to industrialism. To put it differently, modern industrial development would rock the boat of Indian society; nationalism would help stabilize it. In one of his speeches, Nehru warned his audiences in a public meeting in 1957: "We are all in one boat, we have to go forward together. If some people begin to jump about in it, then the boat will not go forward but it will surely capsize."

It is difficult to tell how the Indian nation has performed this role in independent India. It is however true that the Indian society in the 1950s was largely marked by a political consensus and social harmony, necessary pre-conditions to economic growth. But the subsequent decades witnessed considerable turbulence and erosion of harmony. There was also a questioning of the legitimacy of the Indian nation from certain quarters. The globalisation of Indian economy and rapid social changes since the 1990s have created new challenges for Indian nationalism. Only time will tell how the Indian nation will cope with the new challenges. As of now, it is important to recognise that this process of nation-in-making is an ongoing process. Both types of forces – those for and against this process – exist in the society. Certain trends are accelerating this process, but certain other trends are also leading to a disruption of this process. There is however no doubt that Indian nationalism constitutes one of the important legacies of the national movement and has an important role to play in the future of Indian society.

35.3.2 Mass Participation in Politics

Democratisation of Indian politics and mass participation in politics was extremely important features of the national movement. The democratisation took the form of popular participation in the struggles conducted during the course of the movement. Indian democracy is not a gift of the British; it is a product of nationalist struggle for independence. During its life the trajectory of the national movement was like a constantly upward expanding spiral. Each phase of the struggle – from Swadeshi movement to Quit India – brought different segments

– urban population, peasants, workers, students, women, tribals – within the orbit of the national movement. Those groups that joined brought their own momentum and energies to the movement. Popular participation democratised and energized the struggle. A whole range of extremely innovative ways were devised by the ordinary people to carry forward their national movement.

Congress, the leading organisation of the struggle, started the tradition of taking the major decisions after due deliberations and in a democratic manner. Many of the major decisions taken by Congress, for instance launching of the non-cooperation movement in 1920, acceptance of office by Congress in provinces in 1937, and launching of Quit India, were taken after a great deal of debate and discussion. Often the differences within Congress were so serious that they threatened to split the organisation. Congress came quite close to a split with serious differences developing between pro-changers and no-changers after 1922, on the question of entering the legislatures. The split was eventually avoided by the formation of Swaraj party *within* Congress in 1923. Likewise serious differences developed between the Left-wing of Congress, represented by Nehru and Subhas Bose, and the Right-wing represented by Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari, in the 1930s. But these differences were also resolved through debate, discussions and mutual compromises. This could be possible only because of a democratic functioning of the Congress and of the national movement.

After 1947, the Indian constitution adopted the model of parliamentary democracy based on universal adult franchise. The adoption of universal adult franchise came in for quite a bit of scrutiny particularly by some foreign observers. They obviously felt that the low level of literacy in India was not very conducive to opening the society for a full democracy. But the leaders of the national movement thought otherwise. Their contention was that if the illiterate masses of India could participate actively in the national movement, they were mature enough to take independent political decisions and elect their own government. The leaders' faith in the people was obviously rooted in their experience of the national movement and in the practices developed during the national movement. As a result of adopting universal adult franchise, Indian society experienced in 1952 the largest general election in the history of the world. Since then successful elections at the Centre and in states, change of government and the defeat of the ruling parties have become the essential features of Indian politics.

It has to be emphasised that the democratisation of the political structure is easily the biggest achievement of independent India. The main reason why Indian society (with low literacy rate, precarious economic development, and persistent presence of many authoritarian traditions in the society) has successfully adapted to democracy is largely because of the practices evolved during the course of the national movement. It was during the course of the nationalist struggle that the people of India internalised the democratic values and incorporated them in their political behaviour. The Indian democracy today is flourishing and vibrant, though far from perfect. During the last six decades, it has grown and expanded its base considerably. Interestingly, the trajectory it has followed is very similar to that followed during the course of the nationalist struggle. Various groups of Indian people joined the struggle not at one go but in stages. The movement, at the beginning of the 20th century represented at best the middle class urban men, confined to certain pockets of the country. But soon it broke out of the elite fold and began to incorporate students, religious minorities, peasants, women, workers

and tribals in its fold. This is broadly how Indian democracy has proceeded in independent India. Various political and social groups joined Indian democracy in phases and thus enriched it. The major political conflicts in independent India have been conducted *within* the democratic framework, not *about* it. The Indian democracy has also provided enough confidence to its marginalized people – women, tribals, Dalits, Muslims – to launch their specific struggles on their own, without seeking any outside mediation, and by making use of the democratic option. Indian democracy has also worked towards a resolution of conflicts and has enabled the society as a whole to throw up some areas of consensus, though often in a messy, loose and incoherent kind of way.

35.3.3 Promotion of Civil Liberties

Tremendous focus on civil liberties is another major legacy of the national movement. From the very beginning the leaders of the national movement showed concern for civil liberties, namely freedom of the press, speech and association. The freedom of press was very central to early nationalist leadership, because their main political activities were conducted primarily through the press. Gopal Krishna Gokhale was probably the first Indian leader who looked upon education as a basic human right. Although he had always argued against heavy taxation levied by the British, but he was willing to support the existing taxes if British took the responsibility for compulsory primary education. S.N. Banerjea was the first nationalist leader to go to jail for criticizing the British through his journalistic writings. Later under Gandhi's leadership, courting arrest voluntarily became a major political activity of the national movement, when thousands of people offered to go to jail.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Lokmanya Tilak began demanding adult franchise, even though it did not exist in Britain till 1928. As part of their commitment to human rights, the Indian leadership, led by Motilal Nehru and Tej Bahadur Sapru, prepared a national constitution in 1928. Generally known as Nehru Report, it recommended the declaration of fundamental rights, a parliamentary system of government, adult franchise and an independent judiciary. Even though the Nehru Report was rejected by the British, it firmly put on the ledger the uncompromising commitment of the national movement to issues of civil liberties and human rights. In 1936, at the initiative of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Civil Liberties Union (ICLU) was formed along non-party lines for the promotion of civil liberties. Its first circular, drafted by Nehru, stated: "It is proposed to start an Indian Civil Liberties Union, the sole function of which will be the protection of civil liberties in all departments of national activities…. The first object of this Union would be to collect data and give publicity to it. Other activities, such as the organization of public opinion to resist all encroachment on civil liberties would follow." The ICLU was the precursor to the main civil liberty and human rights organizations that developed in independent India.

But it was Gandhi, above all, who provided the clearest and sharpest outline of what should constitute a human right. In 1922, he wrote in his weekly *Young India*: "We must first make good the right of free speech and free association. We must defend these elementary rights with our lives." His definition of these rights was: "Liberty of speech means that it is un-assailed even when the speech hurts; liberty of the press can be said to be truly respected when the press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters. Freedom of

association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects."

It should thus be clear that the Indian national movement provided a robust human rights framework to be pursued in independent India. However, the fate of human rights in independent India has not remained consistent and at the same level throughout the period. There have been times when the society as a whole has suffered from a deficit of human rights and liberties either because of a tilt of the State and its institutions towards authoritarianism, or because of intolerance displayed by one section of society towards other members. Even so, it has to be said that in comparison with many other societies, India certainly enjoys a healthy respect for civil and human rights of the people. There is no doubt that the human rights perspective, in howsoever a limited measure, practised by the Indian society, is an inheritance from the dominant practices developed during the course of the national movement.

35.3.4 Economic Development based on Modern Science and Technology

Almost from the very beginning of the national movement, the leadership developed a vision of a future India as a modern industrial society and economy. The economy was to be based on industrialism making full use of modern science and technology, as had happened in Europe. In fact, their blueprint of India of the future was that of a country which would resemble a European country. As this vision developed in the 20th century, it assigned a central role to the State in leading India's transformation to an affluent industrial society. This vision was codified in the famous Congress resolution on fundamental rights and economic programme, passed at its Karachi session in 1931. The resolution clearly stated: "The State shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of public transport." There was a substantial consensus within Congress that Independent India would strive to become a modern democratic industrial society.

However it is important to emphasize that whereas this was the dominant vision of the future, it was not the only one. At any rate there existed at different points in time two rival perspectives on the future economic development of India, which competed with the mainstream view. First was the vision of a socialist economic development as against a capitalist one. This perspective developed in the 1930s and was led by Nehru and other Left-wing leaders within Congress. According to this perspective, India was to develop as a modern industrial society, but without a dominant role by the capitalist class. The economic policies would be formulated keeping in mind the interests of the large majority of peasants and workers and the excessive concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of the few would be discouraged. Nehru posited capitalism and socialism as two choices before the country and clearly opted for socialism. In 1933 he declared that "capitalism means the developed system of production for profit based on private ownership of means of production." Socialism, on the other hand, meant "the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative system." Socialism meant above all the "nationalization of the instrument of production and distribution." However, this view of India's economic development was held only by some people. Many others in the leadership advocated the development

of India as a modern capitalist society. The consensus that emerged was precisely on those aspects of modern economic development that were in common to both the perspectives, namely, modern industrial development based on science and technology and an important role for the State in promoting key sectors of the economy. This consensus was fully reflected in the formation of a National Planning Committee in 1938 under the chairmanship of Nehru. The Planning Committee was a precursor to the National Planning Commission that was set up in 1950 with the prime minister as its chairman.

The other important perspective was held by Gandhi and some of his followers in the national movement. This perspective was based on decentralisation of resources, minimal use of modern technology, autonomy for the villages and the creation of rural industries. This view was articulated by Gandhi who often showed his reservations for modern economic development based on science and technology and did not share the thinking of the mainstream Congress leadership on the future economic policy. However, it has to be said that he did not at any point confront the mainstream view and certainly did not insist on an inclusion of his economic views into the mainstream economic policy of the national movement. It is necessary to point out here that the famous Karachi resolution on fundamental rights and economic programme, mentioned above, was drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru, presided over by Sardar Patel, and moved in the open session by none other than Gandhi himself!

This mainstream view on economic development constituted an important legacy of the national movement for the economic development of independent India. Having critiqued the industrial revolution earlier in 1930s, Nehru recognised its importance and said in a speech to university students in 1958: "The greatest revolution in the world has in fact been not the French Revolution or the American or Chinese or the Russian Revolution but the Industrial Revolution, the electric revolution and the atomic revolution because they are changing the entire pattern of our lives." It was along these lines that the Indian revolution had to be built.

35.3.5 Secularism

The Indian national movement was organised along secular lines and remained fully committed to secularism till the very end. However this commitment to secularism took different forms. Congress at its Allahabad session in 1887, resolved that it would not take up any question pertaining to religious communities if the majority of that community was opposed to that issue being taken up. Through their articulations, pronouncements and activities, the leaders of the national movement promoted the ideas of separation of religion from politics and State, treatment of religion as a private matter for the individual, symmetrical treatment by the State towards all religions and religious communities, no discrimination on the basis of religion, and active opposition to communalism. All these ideas were pushed ahead in different forms and in different ways at different points in time. The famous Karachi resolution of 1931, for instance, declared that in free India "every citizen shall enjoy freedom of consciousness and the right freely to profess and practise his religion" and that all citizens would be "equal before the law, irrespective of caste, creed or sex in regard to public employment, office of power or honour" and that "the State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions." The Karachi resolution was to remain the linchpin of the basic normative orientation of the national movement towards the major political and economic questions of the day.

However there was a slight difference in the manner in which Gandhi and Nehru, two important leaders of the movement, approached the question of secularism. Though deeply committed to it, they articulated their commitments differently. Gandhi often defined his political commitment in religious terms, because he saw Religion primarily as a source of morality. He was a deeply religious person and he had no hesitation in extending his religious affiliation to all religions, since he saw morality at the base of all religions. In his writings, Gandhi made a conceptual distinction between 'Religion' (written with a capital 'R') and 'religions' (in plural, written with a small 'r' used denominationally for different religions). He then declared: "Religion is one. But religions are many." Religion for him stood for a moral order, which was common to all religions. Gandhi highlighted this distinction of 'one and many' in another way. He argued that 'Religion' was the root of the tree and 'religions' were different branches of the same tree. With such an understanding of Religion, Gandhi openly said that his politics was derived from Religion (i.e., morality). He had no hesitation in openly declaring that for him Religion and politics were not separate but connected to each other. However, in the 1930s Gandhi experienced that a combination of religion and politics produced communalism. He then started arguing in 1940s that "Religion is a private matter which should have no place in politics." He emphasised again in 1947: "Religion is a personal affair of each individual. It must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs." Gandhi's views on religion and secularism should therefore not be seen as contradictory. There is deeper unity and consistency between his total commitment to Religion and also to secularism.

Jawaharlal Nehru approached this question in a different manner. Deeply disturbed by the emergence of communal politics in the 1920s Nehru saw religion as a problem and implicated in the politics of communalism. He equated religion with superstition, irrationalism and intolerance. He therefore felt that a genuine secular polity could be established only if the influence of religion in society was kept to the minimum. In a letter, written in 1926, Nehru argued that the only solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem was to "scotch our so called religion.... How long that will take I cannot say but religion in India will kill that country and its people if not subdued." At this stage Nehru's understanding of secularism was based on a separation of religion and politics and did not allow for any role for religion in social and political life.

However it is interesting that just as Gandhi in 1940s came close to Nehru's position, Nehru also came quite close to Gandhi's basic position on this question. From total opposition to religion in 1920s, Nehru developed a more complex and nuanced position on religion and its role in social life, particularly after 1947. On the one hand, Nehru looked at religion as "blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests." But, on the other hand, it was also a moral force "which supplied a deep inner craving of human beings ...[and] which has brought peace and comfort to innumerable tortured souls." Nehru was very conscious that any attempt to withdraw religion from social life might create a moral vacuum for people.

With this convergence and synergy of ideas between Gandhi and Nehru, the dominant conception of secularism that developed in independent India was neither anti-religion nor was it based on a denial of religion in social life. It was rather based on an opposition to communalism and to any discrimination on the

basis of religion. There is no doubt that this dominant model of Indian secularism derives entirely from the ideas and practices evolved during the course of the national movement, and constitutes its significant legacy.

35.3.6 Independent Foreign Policy

It is not very usual for anti imperialist struggles to have a foreign policy of their own. Foreign policies are normally the preserve of sovereign state systems and not of movements struggling for sovereignty. However the Indian national movement was quite distinctive in this respect in that it showed a tremendous concern with the question of a foreign policy. It evolved an internationalist framework of policy during the course of the movement, which served to provide the blueprint for the foreign policy practised by the State in independent India.

Almost from the very beginning, the Congress leaders refused to accept the British position on major international issues and developed an independent perspective of their own. From the Congress platform, they made a critique of the British policy of annexation and conquests abroad. When the British annexed upper Burma (present-day Myanmar) and made it a part of British India, the Congress leaders opposed it. Their opposition was only partly based on the heavy cost of all such conquests, which had to be met from Indian resources. It also emanated out of a respect for the territorial integrity of another country.

At the beginning of the 20th century these critiques culminated in a concrete policy of opposition to interference by one country in another. When the British tried to interfere in the affairs of Persia and Turkey, the Congress leaders voiced their opposition to it. They were particularly agitated on the fate of Turkey because the Caliph, the Sultan of Turkey, was also considered the spiritual leader of Muslims all over the world. At its 1912 session, the Congress president expressed the "profound sorrow and sympathy" felt by all the non-Muslim Indians for their Muslim brethren for the misfortunes of the Caliphate. Later, at the end of the First World War, Gandhi actually led the Khilafat movement in support of the Khalifa. The movement was fought for a restoration of the power and prestige of the Khalifa of Turkey, which had been promised by the British during the War, and denied subsequently.

Once the national movement came under the active leadership of Gandhi, with Jawaharlal Nehru as his deputy, it acquired truly global dimensions. The new perspective was based on a championship of the twin values of freedom and peace *everywhere*, and for every country. Indian independence was seen as an important component of this project of world peace. It was actually in 1921 that Congress stated its own independent foreign policy. Delinking itself from the foreign policy of the British, Congress highlighted peace, freedom and global cooperation as the necessary building blocks in its foreign policy. This was perhaps the first example of a colony, under imperialist domination, declaring its own independent foreign policy. Gandhi declared: "While we are making our plans for Swaraj, we are bound to consider and define our foreign policy. Surely we are bound authoritatively to tell the world what relations we wish to cultivate with it."

Once Congress dissociated itself from the British foreign policy, it began to support freedom struggles by other Asian countries against European imperialism. It expressed solidarity with the struggles of Arabs, Egypt, Burma, Sri Lanka and

China. Gandhi began to talk of an Asian Federation, committed to freedom and peace. Nehru attended the International Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels in 1927. This really internationalised the Indian struggle for freedom. India and China came close together for the first time. The national movement now began to openly express solidarity with all the struggles against Western imperialism. At Nehru's initiative, Congress affiliated itself with the League against Imperialism set up at Brussels. Congress now declared from its platform that the Indian struggle was part of a great world struggle against the very system of Imperialism. In the same year, 1927, Nehru visited the Soviet Union on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and was very impressed with the transformation in the social conditions in a short span of time. The British foreign policy in India had been largely shaped by a kind of Russo-phobia. Nehru demolished this myth and provided a new vantage point from where the Soviet Russia appeared more like an ally rather than an aggressor. It was also at Brussels that Nehru became aware of the problems of Latin Americans, groaning under the weight of American imperialism, through his contacts with the Latin American delegates. Later, in the 1930s and 40s, the Indian national movement took a stand on Spanish Civil War, expressed solidarity with the Chinese people in their struggle against Japanese aggression and declared its firm, uncompromising opposition to Fascism.

The sum total of the foreign policy as practiced by the national movement was a combined commitment both to Indian nationalism and internationalism. Nehru took the lead in this but he was supported by Gandhi and other leaders of the movement. Nehru realised that the British imperialism could not be defeated till Imperialism as a whole was dismantled. It was in this sense that each colony of Asia and Africa needed to fight against its imperialist power but also fight collectively against Imperialism as a system. The two struggles, the nationalist and the global, needed to complement each other in order for both to be successful.

It was also during this period that Gandhi developed the practice of making appeals to the people of other countries. He wrote letters to 'every Briton', 'every Japanese' and also to 'American friends'. He chided the people of Japan for Japanese aggression in China. In sheer desperation, Gandhi even wrote a letter to Hitler, imploring him to prevent the War "which may reduce humanity to a savage state."

This was the major legacy of the national movement to the leaders of independent India. There is no doubt that the edifice of a foreign policy in independent India was based on the foundations laid during the national movement. When India became independent in 1947, some of its foreign policy priorities, both immediate and long-term, were: i) end of colonialism and the prevention of its re-emergence in some other form; ii) defining its political and strategic worldview in the new conflict between the Western allies led by the USA and the Socialist group led by the USSR; and iii) what relations to adopt vis-a-vis the neighbouring countries, particularly China and Pakistan. In formulating independent India's response to these questions, the Indian government went by the policy standards that had been set during the course of the national movement. It has to be said that in spite of setbacks (e.g., the China War in 1962), the foreign policy framework evolved in independent India has stood the test of time and owes in no small measure to the practices and the perspective adopted by the Indian national movement.

35.4 WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

After making a positive appraisal of the Indian National Movement and its relevance for independent India, it is perhaps necessary to point out certain areas of weakness and shortcomings that accompanied the movement. It is generally said that a people get the nation they deserve, and vice-versa. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of the Indian national movement. Because the movement was truly representative of Indian society and people, it also carried their strengths and weaknesses within its fold. So, even as the movement initiated a transformation of the Indian society in a modern direction, it was also transformed by the society. This dialogical relationship between the movement and the society had one great advantage that the movement remained firmly rooted to the Indian soil. But it also carried a disadvantage. It curtailed the capacity of the movement to carry out a rapid and radical transformation of the Indian social structure in a modern direction. As a result the society that emerged after 1947, contained not just the positive features of the Indian tradition, but also some of its negative features (such as hierarchy, patriarchy, caste prejudices, among others). It is indeed strange that the truly representative capacity of the movement, which strengthened it, also limited its transformative potentials.

At the local level, the national movement was not carried out by doctrinally trained political cadre but by ordinary men and women. Also the channels of control at the top were held rather loosely. Considerable autonomy was exercised by the participants of the movement at various levels. This lack of strict control from the top, along with multiple diversities that existed in the movement as well as in the society, meant that the movement as a whole was never completely free from centrifugal pressures and fissiparous tendencies. It was also clear that if these tendencies developed and grew stronger, the leadership of the movement would find it very difficult to handle these pressures successfully. The development of such political tendencies and the inability of the Congress leadership to successfully counter it actually resulted in the partition of the country and the national unity being compromised. However it has to be added that in order to be free from both the possible shortcomings (incapacity for radical transformation and the inability to force national unity), the national movement would have had to be structured along very different lines. As it happens both the weaknesses of the national movement have also carried to the very fabric of society in independent India.

35.5 SUMMARY

In this, the final Unit of the course, the following points were highlighted:

- The Indian national movement represented an extremely large consensus of the Indian people against British imperialism. Although elements of anti-imperialism existed among sections of the population prior to the movement, it was really transformed into a national and nationalist force during the course of the movement. The movement was based on the twin ideas of anti-imperialism and national unity. It was organised like a platform and anyone who believed in these two ideas could become a part of this consensus.
- The movement practised and upheld the version of Indian nation that was territorial, civil and non-coercive. These features set the benchmarks for the direction in which the Indian nation was to grow after 1947.

- The mass participation in politics and a programmatic commitment to secularism made sure that both democracy and secularism developed as the major ideas and ideals in independent India.
- The national movement paid special attention to the question of civil liberties and also developed an independent foreign policy framework.
- However, an incapacity for a radical social transformation and an inability to effectively deal with centrifugal and fissiparous forces were two notable weaknesses of the national movement. These weaknesses too appear to have carried into the body politic of independent India. It can therefore be concluded that society and politics in independent India may be considered to have lived under the shadows of the national movement.

35.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the role played by the Indian nationalist movement in emphasising the principles of democracy and secularism in independent India.
2) Do you think that the nationalist movement was responsible for evolving a policy framework for economic development in independent India?
3) Analyse the weaknesses and limitations of the legacies of the nationalist movement in India.

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